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A Soldier's Life:The Civil War Experiences of Ben C. Johnson

Ben C. Johnson

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Edited, with an Introduction, by Alan S. Brown

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(Originally entitled,
SKETCHES OF THE SIXTH REGIMENT
MICHIGAN INFANTRY)

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BENJAMIN C. JOHNSON
Company F, Sixth Michigan Infantry New Orleans, 1863
(Courtesy Michigan Historical Commission Archives)

FOREWORD

This issue of Faculty Contributions, *A Soldier's Life,* is a significant contribution to the literature appearing during the Civil War Centennial. It is particularly appropriate in that the unit with which this diary is concerned, the 6th Michigan Infantry Regiment, rendezvoused in Kalamazoo, Michigan on August 20, 1861. It is hoped that the tales that are presented will enable the reader to have empathy with the trials and tribulations of one soldier who participated in one of the most distressing events in the history of the United States.

In a few places in the text it will be observed that Johnson makes unflattering references to minority racial groups. This is, of course, a reflection of the prejudice and custom of his own age. In the interest of historical accuracy such references have been retained, but it should be noted the retention of them does not reflect the opinion of the editor or publisher.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Michigan had a major role in the Civil War despite the fact that no battles were fought on her soil. The state sent over 90,000 men from a population of 749,113 persons to various fighting and service units. Of those who served almost 15,000 perished in battle or from disease. The home front also felt the impact of war in numerous ways, especially in an economic sense. Michigan's agriculture, commerce, and industry were all greatly stimulated. When the soldiers returned they found their state on the verge of new ways of life for which urbanization and industrialization were the hallmarks. It was a time of change and of exciting events.

But for the men who served in the various Michigan units the war remained the one great event in their lives. These men, many barely old enough to enlist, had hurried to the nearest recruiting office when news of Fort Sumter's fall and Lincoln's call for volunteers reached Michigan. They were anxious to share in a great adventure, they wanted to fight for the Union, and some wanted to strike a blow against slavery. Their patriotism, love of adventure, and devotion to principle suffered severe trials in the hard fighting they saw during the war. But when it was over, and the fortunate had returned home, they never ceased to think, talk, and write of their experiences. What Bruce Catton has observed for the nation was also true for them as individuals. The Civil War, Catton notes, went "closer to the bone, and left a deeper imprint on the national spirit than any other war we ever fought." The old soldiers formed veterans organizations, such as the G. A. R., and at meetings and annual encampments they reminisced and relived the momentous war years. For many of a later generation a lifetime interest in the Civil War grew out of listening to the tales of the veterans, or was stirred by watching the blue clad survivors march in holiday parades.

Benjamin C. Johnson, whose war experiences are here presented, was one of those "boys in blue." He was a young

farm worker of Sumpter township, Wayne county, when news of the war reached Michigan. Like thousands of others, he quickly decided to enlist in the Union cause. His company, the Saline Sharpshooters, became Company F, Sixth Michigan Infantry Regiment when that unit was organized at Kalamazoo in the summer of 1861.

Johnson was born in Ashtabula, Ohio on September 5, 1840, but spent most of his life in Michigan. In the years after the war he made his home in Kalamazoo until 1885, and was a Lansing resident at his death in 1888. Apart from his account of his war experiences few personal details survive Johnson, but state and national archives records give a bare factual outline of his life. They show that he married Emily Rockwell, of Barry county, on Christmas Day 1865, and that the couple was childless. In 1879 Johnson made his first application for a disability pension, but an Adjutant General's report of two years later found no evidence of disability. Eventually Johnson succeeded in gaining a pension, however, for his widow reported that he was drawing one at the time of his death.

In the period of the 1880's there was a great deal of activity on the part of Civil War veterans groups to secure benefits for their members. One aspect of this activity in Michigan was the appearance in August, 1883, of the *Veteran*, a semi-monthly "devoted to the interests of the boys of '61 to '65." This publication, edited by W. L. Smith, of Lansing, announced that it was "in the field to stay until justice is rendered to all old soldiers." Specific aims relating to pensions, bounty lands, etc., were listed, and the *Veteran* held itself ready to "fight it out on this line if it takes a lifetime."

Publication of the *Veteran* apparently stimulated Ben Johnson to put down his personal recollections of duty with the Sixth Michigan. Accordingly, in 1883-84, the *Veteran* carried his story. The novelty of Johnson's account is that it represents the enlisted man's viewpoint. On the whole it is a surprisingly accurate reconstruction of the part played by the Sixth Infantry, and Johnson's own Company F. As

his story makes clear, the tasks assigned this Michigan regiment were not easy, and the conditions under which it served equalled in hardships those of any unit in the war. From March 1862, when it joined General Benjamin F. Butler's expedition to New Orleans, until August 1865, when it was mustered out, the Sixth Infantry served in the Department of the Gulf. In this area the enemy was not only Confederate troops, but broiling hot sun, miasmal marshes, and reptile infested swamps. There were battle casualties in plenty, but disease was the real killer. Figures make this clear: the Sixth Infantry lost more men through disease than any other Michigan unit.

Perhaps because there were few spectacular battles in its sector, or possibly because of the great distance involved, the people of Michigan heard less of the activities of the Sixth Infantry than of most Michigan units. As Johnson points out, there were no other Michigan troops with his regiment, and only two other western regiments in its area. The people of southwestern Michigan, however, were vitally concerned with the Sixth Infantry: it was largely composed of men from that region. Company designations from A to K included men from the following places: Niles, St. Joseph, Schoolcraft, Dowagiac, Marshall, Saline, Allegan, Albion, and Charlotte.

Aside from some changes in paragraphing and the modernization of a few words Ben Johnson's account is printed here as it appeared in 1883-84. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. George S. May and Miss Geneva Kebler, Archivists for the Michigan Historical Commission. Thanks is also extended to Mr. James Babcock, Chief, Burton Historical Collection, and to Mr. Frank Scannell, Reader's Services, Michigan State Library, for making available copies of the *Veteran* for this edition. Miss Bonnie Berthaum designed the cover, and the maps were drawn by Allen R. Smith. In all stages of the preparation of this account for publication Dr. Willis F. Dunbar, Chairman of the History Department, Western Michigan University, has been generous in interest and encouragement.

SKETCHES OF THE SIXTH REGIMENT MICHIGAN INFANTRY

INTRODUCTORY

I need not make any formal bow and introduction farther than this: I was a poor man's son, working on a farm at the time the news reached us that war was inevitable—that Fort Sumpter had been fired upon by those in open rebellion to this Government. Like others of my boyhood friends I went to the recruiting office, opened in the small village of Saline, Washtenaw county, Mich., and presented myself for enrollment in the grand army of our country's defenders. Although I had scarcely reached the required age to qualify me for a common soldier, yet I managed to get in. I went—not for money, not for honor, not for high rank, not for lauded honors, but from principle. I went because I loved my country; I honored and respected its flag; and felt it my duty to protect it from the ruthless grasp of the hydra-headed monster, Treason, that had essayed to trail it forever in the dust. Loyalty prompted me to offer my services to the Nation in her hour of fearful peril.

How well I performed my part I am not to tell more than this: I remained with the Company and Regiment from its first formation in August, 1861, to its disbandment in September, 1865, and was never in a hospital or excused from duty more than a day or two, now and then, from some slight indisposition, and these excuses were few and far between. Perhaps the whole time during my service of over four years would not sum up one week's time. Always with my company, always on hand for volunteer service when called for from the several companies, as you will see if you follow my history through to the end. Trusting all will pardon my poor attempt to review those old army times and that all will excuse my poor composition, I proceed with my work.

CHAPTER I

The Sixth Regiment Michigan Infantry was rendezvoused at Kalamazoo, and was mustered into the United States service on the 20th of August, 1861, and soon after took its leave of dear old Michigan to meet the uncertainties "at the front."[1] We had been promised at enlistment a furlough of some few days to visit our homes, prior to leaving the State, and the most of us doted upon the pleasure of once again seeing our dear fathers, and mothers, sisters, brothers and sweethearts. I was fortunate enough, however, not to have any "best girl," and consequently was spared the trying ordeal of leaving one for such uncertainties. We were expecting every day the privilege of going home for a few days; but alas! how sadly were we disappointed. Boys of the Sixth, do you remember the time? Orders came from the War Department for our regiment to report at once at Washington. There was no time for delay. Great danger threatened our National Capitol, and we must give up our cherished hopes and go to the rescue without the last parting embrace—without the last benediction of loving and beloved parents.

We had no arms except the ones nature gave us; no flag, although there was one being made for us. Thus, all unprepared for war, we bade farewell to our quarters on the old fair grounds at Kalamazoo, and with proud step took up our first line of march for the M.C.R.R. depot. Here good passenger coaches were in waiting to carry the

1. The regiment left Kalamazoo on August 30, 1861 with 944 officers and men on its rolls. John Robertson (comp.), *Michigan in the War* (Lansing, 1882), p. 260. Details as to the engagements and encampments of the 6th Michigan in the notes which follow have been drawn mainly from Robertson, pp. 260-269, and the following references: Michigan, Adjutant General's Office, *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Kalamazoo, 1905), vol. 6; Frederick H. Dyer (comp.), *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines, 1907), pp. 1284-85.

boys as far as Detroit. There we took passage on a lake steamer that landed us in due time at Cleveland, Ohio. We were now fairly started upon our mission, and, though sad at leaving our own native State without a parting farewell, yet proudly we determined to "keep a stiff upper-lip" and do our duty. At Cleveland we passed again into good passenger coaches and were borne toward our destination on the Baltimore & Ohio R. R. At Altoona we were marched off the train and tendered a banquet by the citizens, to which we rendered full justice. Then onward again toward Baltimore.

We had been informed of the reception the Massachusetts soldiers received at the hands of the citizens of Baltimore. They had been assaulted by a mob and sorely jeered. We did not know at that time that there was any more feeling toward the Massachusetts men than toward Michigan men by the people of the South. Therefore it was with some apprehension that we approached the great city. But we essayed to prepare ourselves for defense as best we could. We knew that mobs generally used sticks and stones for missiles of warfare, and our men, coming from among the sturdy yeomanry of the North, we felt certain that with equal implements of warfare we could give them a warm greeting if they attempted to serve up our welcome in the same manner. Therefore, a short distance out from the city limits we jumped off the train, while it halted for some purpose, and armed ourselves with plenty of cobble stones and such stout clubs as we could find. It was indeed a novel sight to see the Sixth Michigan preparing for their first grand fight.

Soon we again moved onward and you could have seen the boys peering out at every crossing for the ambushed mob. You could have heard Bill say, "John, do you see any signs of them ahead?" "All quiet, yet," would come the response, and thus we entered the city where we found the truest and best friends outside our own State that we met during our whole experience as soldiers. No mob cared to face the determined men from loyal old Michigan, and in

due time we rolled into the station and were transferred into cars bound for the capital city, Washington. We hesitated some time here, but at last an order came to retain the Sixth Michigan in Baltimore until further orders. Now, we must openly march unarmed quite a long distance through the narrow crowded streets to a place of encampment, but this regiment never faltered from duty from first to last, and again we took up our line of march not knowing what reception the citizens might give us when they came to know that we were to camp in the very midst of them. However, we were not interfered with but marched quietly to our camping ground on McKim's Place (or Hill), an elevation that commanded a view of nearly the whole city. We were furnished tents and soon made ourselves comfortable. Not many days passed before we received our Springfield muskets and commenced our drill for service. Prior to this we knew nothing of drill, either in field, maneuver or manual of arms. We knew it was for our good to acquire efficiency in those drills and truly before we left Baltimore none could excel us. We would have dared to compete even with the regulars of the United States service.

We learned in after time why the Massachusetts men were used so roughly and our men treated so grandly by the citizens of Baltimore.

CHAPTER II

At the close of my first chapter I left the regiment comfortably settled at McKim's Hill at Baltimore. Here the boys found acquaintances among the citizens and there was scarcely a member of the regiment but had friends that were ever anxious for their company at tea and for an evening's visit. A game of chess, or whist, or euchre, perhaps, while others were invited to attend church, or to join the Sons of Temperance, and others to visit places of amusement. I tell you, the boys enjoyed it hugely—this first experience in army life. But afterward we learned to our sorrow that there is truth in the old saying that "one must take the bitter with the sweet." This was our sunny day in the South; afterward came the tempest and the withering storm.

It was while we were encamped at Baltimore that I first joined the grand old order of Sons of Temperance. In the lodge both male and female members were equal and I loved to meet them there, and I learned a lesson in temperance that was my shield during the coming scenes of terrible strife. I formed a principle there by the influence of Baltimore people that has been my guide from that day to this. I may have wandered once or twice in the far swamps of Louisiana, but it was my aim to live the life of a strictly temperate man. Of this truth my comrades will bear me witness, both in times of war and peace.

While we were here the flag presented by the ladies of Kalamazoo, came to us and was formally presented by Col. F. W. Curtenius, our loved and honored commander.[2] The boys received it amid shouts of delight, and cheer

2. Frederick William Curtenius became heir to a distinguished military tradition at his birth in New York city on September 30, 1806. Both his grandfathers had served in the American Revolution, and during the War of 1812 his father, Peter C., commanded New York troops. Colonel Curtenius' own military career began in 1824 when

after cheer resounded from the hill in welcome of the banner which bore the simple inscription, "Do your duty;" and we now call any to cite to us one single instance where the Sixth Michigan proved recreant to this trust.

We had been in Baltimore some time, say perhaps three or four months, when we were ordered on an expedition, under General Lockwood, down on the eastern shore of Virginia, in Accomac and Northampton counties. We were transported by steamer and landed in due time on the sacred soil of old Virginia. There was a force of Rebels trying to fortify and hold this neck of land, but when our forces came they informally bade adieu to their partially completed works and retreated, leaving quite a number of field pieces in our possession without even giving us a

he went to South America to fight in the revolutionary uprisings which helped bring independence to the Latin American republics. In 1831 Curtenius was commissioned Colonel in the New York militia.

By 1835 Curtenius had settled in Kalamazoo, where he farmed acreage on Grand Prairie. During the Mexican War he served as Captain, and was responsible for recruiting Kalamazoo's Company A, 1st Michigan Infantry. This unit saw no combat action but did reach Vera Cruz in January, 1848.

After his Mexican War service Curtenius served as state senator for the 25th District, and was Michigan Adjutant General, 1855-61. He continued in public service following his Civil War experience and subsequently held the following positions: Treasurer of the Michigan Asylum for the Insane; president, village of Kalamazoo; state senator; Collector of Internal Revenue, 4th District. In addition, Col. Curtenius was a successful businessman and acted as president of the Kalamazoo City Bank, 1866-68.

When the Civil War began Curtenius helped recruit the 6th Michigan Infantry and continued to serve with it until June 20, 1862, when he resigned. His resignation came after he refused to obey an order from Gen. Thomas Williams to return to their owners a number of slaves who had sought freedom within his regiment's lines. Curtenius believed that the state of Michigan had not commissioned him to return slaves, and state officials apparently agreed with him since they sustained his actions. Samuel W. Durant (ed.) *History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan* (Everts & Abbott, Phila., 1880), p. 278; Laurence L. Vickery, "Frederick William Curtenius," Papers from the History Seminar, Kalamazoo College, No. 39, Kalamazoo Public Library.

salute.[3] Of course we were not overly anxious for said salute, but we would have returned the compliment all the same.

I am reminded of one or two little incidents that occurred while we were there, and will picture them from memory as best I can. Now, this General Lockwood was a Maryland man and we Michiganders always thought that he was more in sympathy with the Rebels down there than he was with the forces under his command. Some of the boys had "reached" for some chickens—for potpie, I presume—and the General issued an order that any soldier caught confiscating anything from the citizens should receive death. Yes, that was the penalty, but those Michigan men were noted for bravery and stood ever ready to "beard the lion in his den." Therefore, one night the boys, tired and hungry after a forced march of twenty-six miles, spied a roost of turkeys near camp. Some time in the evening they had their turkey pot-pie. In the morning complaint was made to the General that his men had been stealing turkeys. The first exclamation from him was, "It's that d—d Sixth Michigan; they would steal the cents off their dead father's eyes, but mind you the thief shall suffer the penalty." Accordingly, the Sixth Michigan were ordered out for inspection, and oh, how terribly anxious we were lest some of our dear comrades should be sacrificed to appease the General's wrath. We bethought ourselves of some little strategy to divert the coming storm; the whisper went the rounds: we have a comrade who has been unable for duty for several days and carried in an ambulance, yet he is able to walk a short distance, and will to save his comrades from death. We will have him in our ranks and upon his back shall rest the fatal feather that is to betray the thief. Our lines are formed. The General and staff took position, and we

3. This expedition, led by Brig. Gen. H. H. Lockwood, began on Nov. 14, 1861 with the object of dispersing Confederate troops commanded by Gen. Henry A. Wise. The 6th returned to Baltimore on Dec. 8, 1861.

marched by and, sure enough, the General pounced upon our sick comrade as the thief. But "stop," say our officers (God bless their generous, kind hearts,) "this comrade is unable to do any duty, even walk on our march, we have carried him in an ambulance; you are wrong, General, it must have been some soldier from the Maryland troops." The boys forgot military discipline for the moment and such cheers and imitating of the fowl captured I never heard; they fairly gobbled him out of camp, and the "loyal General" retired, baffled and discomfitted, pouring out vile epithets upon the Michigan men.

Once again we were passing a country school house (and they were rare indeed) and the school mistress came out with her children and waved the starry banner as we marched by. It gave the boys new life; cheer after cheer rose up as the companies marched by. Again, we were passing the humble dwelling of a poor white man and we were asked thus, "Where did yees all come from?" "We came from Michigan." "From Mich-i-gan! how large is Mich-i-gan—is it as large as Baltimore? We did not suppose there were so many Yankees in the whole North as there are of you uns." Those people were kept in ignorance and told that the North would soon yield to the demands of the South.

But I must hurry on, lest I make this chapter too long and weary the reader. We returned to Baltimore again and went into camp at our old quarters. The ladies of Baltimore presented the regiment with a fine banner. One of the prominent lawyers made the presentation speech, but I have forgotten his name—suffice to say it was grand and loyal. Colonel Curtenius made the response, and to say he did nobly would be but a faint description of his speech. There was an immense gathering of people present to see and hear.

At Baltimore we buried our first comrade, marching with reversed arms to time of muffled drums and firing our parting salute over his grave. Sadly we broke the news to his dear mother at home; consoling her, inasmuch as

her son and our comrade had lacked nothing in the way of comforts, delicacies or tender watchful care, that we offered him up as our first sacrifice upon the altar of our Nation's honor. Who might be the next sacrifice we knew not. Time passed, and six months had sped away since we left our loved Michigan.

CHAPTER III

Orders came at last for the Sixth Michigan to join General Butler's force against New Orleans. To this order the citizens objected and raised an appeal. They drew up a petition and presented it asking that the Michigan men be allowed to remain in their city, and their own men sent instead. They had learned to love and respect the honest true-hearted men of the North even more than their own soldiers, and were not slow in making known the fact. But General Butler wanted true men with him in the far South and would not give over his claim on our regiment.

The day of embarkation came and thousands followed us to the landing to bid us good bye.[4] Tears flowed down the cheeks of old men and maidens. Some had established more than ordinary friendships. Pledges had been made and were sacredly kept by some, at least, who returned in after years and claimed their brides. I have said our regiment was composed of young men. Then wonder not at our forming acquaintance with the fair sex where we were so highly esteemed and honored. Your humble servant may have made acquaintances among that sex, but did not bind himself with any promises that might prove unwisely made in the after years. I had many friends in the city and might perhaps have been sad to part with them, but my country first, then afterwards, if I lived—a wife and happy home. I may tell you how I secured both ere I finish my story, but not now. Amid the tears, prayers and blessings of this kindhearted people, we marched upon the steamer's deck that should carry us to Fortress Monroe, or a little farther up the James river to Newport News. Nothing of any note transpired on our voyage farther than, having a leaky boat we made slow progress, and got terribly hungry before we reached Old Point Comfort.

4. The 6th left Baltimore on Feb. 22, 1862 and encamped at Newport News, Va. on the 23rd.

At Fortress Monroe we went on shore and viewed the great fort. Outside on the beach we saw the great Floyd ex-Union and Lincoln guns, into any one of which a man could crawl, turn round and come out face foremost. We only halted here a short time and then went on up to Newport News and into camp where Butler's forces were collecting for the far South expedition against New Orleans and the opening of the great river. We were here only a few days, and came near being drowned out of our tents by the heavy fall of rain. We had to dig trenches to save ourselves. Again we were ordered to move; this time upon the great ocean steamer, *Constitution*.[5] Our regiment, the Fourth Wisconsin and Twenty-first Indiana—three Western or Northern regiments—all told three thousand and one hundred men. These, with the crew, made quite a goodly number of passengers for one boat to carry around the Florida reefs to Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico. When all was in readiness we steamed down the river and as we came opposite Sewell's Point the Johnnies fired a salute, and right well they did it too, for two shots passed directly over us and plunged into the water on the other side; others still fell short, but luckily, none touched our craft.

But when I think of how our boys crouched down behind the glass upper top of the cabin for refuge, I laugh even until this day. Remember, this was the first time we were ever under fire and we did not want to die there, for we longed to meet the foe on more equal footing. I remember how Captain Corden,[6] of my company (who, by the way, was an old hero of the siege of Sevastopol, I think,) stood up in his dignified manner and said, "Boys, what are you doing down there?" Then he laughed at our fears and we felt kind of ashamed when we came to con-

5. The regiment embarked March 4, 1862.

6. Captain John Corden, Saline. Capt., Aug. 19, 1861, Major, Feb. 1, 1864, Lt. Col., Oct. 16, 1864, mustered out as Capt. to date Aug. 26, 1864, and honorably discharged.

sider how ridiculous we made ourselves appear hiding behind so frail a breastwork. But we must live and learn and by and by the boys did not crouch down or hide from the storm of iron hail that swept them into the kingdom come. We were soon out of reach and no longer in range of those powerful guns that carried their missiles from five to seven miles distant. Out into the great ocean we steamed and headed for the Gulf of Mexico. Not long out before rough weather came upon us; inso much that the officers said, "Close down the hatches upon the men." Our old craft reeled to and fro and the waters surged over her decks from time to time. Oh, what a time! Were you ever there? Three thousand men all sea sick at once and closely housed down in the hold of a filthy transport—no air, no water fit to quench the thirst, no food fit to eat, filth everywhere—we began to get some of the bitter. Well, we said we could not stand that; we must have air; we would just as soon go to the bottom as not; if we were going to die we wanted fresh air in our nostrils at the last breath. We burst the hatches and rushed on deck regardless of the consequences. But we believed in a just God, the Ruler of the Universe, and we believed he spared our lives for some future purpose.

The old steamer creaked and groaned in every joint. The waves burst off the heavy, three-inch plank on her guard, after the wheel house; salt covered the smoke stack from top to bottom, yet she weathered the storm with her thirty-one hundred souls and made the gulf-stream where things became more quiet. We went so far out, in order to escape the reefs, that with a glass we could see the island of Cuba. After eight days of this rough usage we hove in sight of land, and oh, never in all life did green shrubs and trees look half so beautiful as then, and when my feet touched the sand of Ship Island I was happy indeed, as were all my comrades.[7] But even here we were far from safe, as I will show you presently.

7. The regiment disembarked at Ship Island, Miss., March 13, 1862, and remained there to April 14th.

This latitude is noted for its severe storms and we had not been here long ere we had some experience in the matter. In pitching our tents we had driven long stakes into the sand, three or four feet. One night about midnight one of these storms came upon us; in a twinkling our tents were blown flat to the ground. The stakes proved no barrier against the violence of the storm; the lightning flashed vividly and claps of thunder burst near us on every hand; the rain fell in torrents and we were drenched through and through underneath our canvas houses. In the morning we made the best of it and reared our cloth houses again. Word came that sad havoc had been made over at the guard tent. I went over, and there I saw four comrades, with blackened faces, stiff and cold, killed by a bolt of the electric fluid which had come down the center pole of the tent and twisted into all conceivable shapes the muskets stacked around it; killing four men, yet not seriously injuring one man who was lying between the two that were killed. I am reminded that I must close this chapter and will commence the next with the famous "order of combat" drill.

CHAPTER IV

Now, General Williams, our Brigade General, had a pet theory of his own aside from any established military drill and essayed to attain honors from its conceiving. This renowned drill was styled by him the "Order of Combat."[8] We were called out in heavy marching order—heavy knapsacks, heavy guns and forty rounds of ammunition, to drill in the sand, ankle deep. We would go up among the sand hills on the island, find some imaginary stronghold of the enemy in some secluded hollow surrounded by those loose piles of sand and at the command of "Order of combat—march," we would have to double-quick with our heavy loads through this awful sand and charge the imaginary foe. Sometimes the men fell exhausted, unable to reach the objective point. This was to train us and make our limbs and bodies able to endure fatigue when we should reach the main land again, in Louisiana state, and also to learn us how to charge successfully upon the enemy. It came to be a by-word—this order of "combat march," and the General had enough of it in due time, no doubt. He could hear it almost any time if within hearing of the camps or quarters of the three regiments of western men.

There was scarcely any green thing upon this desert island. I believe there were a few stunted pines in the center. We remained there quite a number of days until

8. Thomas Williams, Brig. Gen. Vols., Sept. 28, 1861. He was the son of John R. Williams, a well-known Detroiter, and had graduated from West Point in 1837. Among his classmates were several Civil War generals, including Hooker, for the Union, and Van Dorn, for the Confederacy. Williams served with distinction in the Mexican War, and was breveted Major for gallantry in action at Chapultepec, Sept. 13, 1847. His "Order of Combat" drill was disliked by officers (see note 15) as well as enlisted men. A series of Williams' letters to his family reveal him to be highly conscientious and also most unhappy with the conduct of volunteer troops and officers. He was killed in action at Baton Rouge, La., August 5, 1862. See *American Historical Review,* XIV (Jan. 1909) pp. 304-328.

the noble naval Commander, Farragut, arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi with his fleet of gunboats and mortar-boats. Then we bade adieu to Ship Island, and the same three regiments of western men went on board the *Great Republic,* a sailing vessel, and were towed to the mouth of the great river.[9] Some of the troops were landed and marched in rear of the powerful fort, guarding the main channel of the river above the several outlets. For the space of twenty-one days, if I remember rightly, we waited on ship-board for the right of way up the river. A continuous bombardment was going on night and day by our fleet. It was quite a novel sight at night to see the train of fire from the mortar shells as they described their arc and fell into the Rebel stronghold. Admiral Porter knew how to manage his mortar fleet and did very good execution with his armament. At last the bold Farragut ran the gauntlet between the Forts Jackson and St. Phillip, and charged the Rebel fleet just above the fort. Quick work was now made of the fight, and soon the great Mississippi was open for Yankee boats and Yankee troops to ascend its muddy channel.

We were transferred to vessels of lighter draught and soon found ourselves standing up the river toward the great Crescent City. We met with no serious opposition and in due time arrived at the levees of New Orleans.[10] Well, this was considerably farther from our Michigan homes than Baltimore, and we found a different class of people to receive us—to give us welcome to their city. The Sixth Michigan were among the first troops that stepped upon the landing. Although no violence was offered us when we landed (the city having been evacuated by the Confederate troops) in a physical form yet in a mental form we heard such words as this to cheer us in our new home, "Yaller

9. When the 6th left Ship Island it went with the 4th Wisconsin and the 21st Indiana as part of the expedition against New Orleans under command of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler.

10. The 6th arrived in New Orleans May 2, 1862.

Jack (meaning yellow fever) will take all you Yanks before you are here very long." Strange as it may appear, not a case of yellow fever occurred in Louisiana during the war. The Giver of all good stayed the fell destroyer while the Michigan men were freeing his children from the bondage of human slavery.

I must confine myself to the Sixth Michigan principally, although I may at some points in my story call the other western regiments into notice as connected in the movements of the Sixth. There were only the three regiments in the Nineteenth Army Corps, Department of the Gulf — the Sixth Michigan, Fourth Wisconsin and Twenty-first Indiana, and when together these regiments were like a family of noble brothers, always true to each other. We were at last ready to march to the interior of the rankest of all secession cities. The Confederates had seized upon the United States Mint and had carried away or destroyed all its dies and plates. To this Government building we were marched for quarters, and found right good quarters for the time. We had our guard line around the grounds and the citizens would taunt the men on guard, calling them everything but decent men, accuse them of having come to their city to destroy the reputation and virtue of their women. They would crowd over the line and defy the men to stop them. This of course was reported to General Butler, and he soon "cooked their hash" for them in this manner: A general order was issued for no soldier to go any distance from his command without his side arms, giving him authority to use them in self defense if necessary, also for sentries on guard to resist any attempt to break over the guard line, even to using fixed bayonets.[11]

11. Benjamin F. Butler (1818-1893) of Lowell, Massachusetts, was a good example of what Bruce Catton calls "political generals." During his war service and in later political life he was frequently the center of controversy. At New Orleans he had the difficult task of occupying a city of 168,000 population with a force of less than 3000 troops. Above all, Butler sought to maintain order and respect for the flag of the United States. One of his first acts in New Orleans was to

I remember very distinctly one evening just at dusk, I was guard at a corner beat; there was a crowd of roughs over on the opposite corner (and, by the way, the above orders had been published in the city papers so that the citizens might know what power was vested in the common Yankee soldiers) and among them was one great, burly, ugly-looking fellow with liquor enough in him to make him fiendish-like. His fellows kept setting him on to crowd upon my line. His vile epithets and detestable appearance rather riled my Michigan grit. Little by little he came on, his associates telling him to "cross the line, for the d—n Yankee dasn't do anything." I guess I was pretty mad by this time and thought to myself, "you'll miss your calculations I reckon if you go too far." At last he attempted to cross my beat, and I thrust out, not very easily either, and gave him a prod with my bayonet. I saw the blood was trickling out on his clothing, still he stood in defiance— hadn't got enough yet—I said, "Come on, my friend, I'll give you satisfaction if you want to try it again." About this time his associates came over and took him away. I did not want to hurt the fellow too much, but if he had come again I might have made an example of him, for I was pretty well stirred up by that time and, my comrades were watching not far distant to see the outcome of my adventure with the New Orleans rough. After that they desisted from crossing our lines. Several times the boys were set upon in the city when out on passes, but they soon learned that Michigan men

hang William B. Mumford for insulting and degrading the flag. But his most controversial act, and one which led the South to call him "Beast," was General Order No. 28, issued May 15, 1862. By this order any woman of New Orleans who showed contempt or disrespect for officers and soldiers of the United States was to be "regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation." Butler was removed from command in New Orleans in December, 1862, but continued in service until January, 1865. After the war he served several terms in Congress and one term as governor of his state. For details of his career see *Dictionary of American Biography* and Robert S. Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler* (Macmillan: New York, 1954).

were made of metal not easily tampered with and that theirs was bulldog grit. But I tell you it was not safe for a comrade to go unarmed or alone, even with arms for the first few weeks after we landed among them. And regarding the virtue of their women, I never saw in my life a city so fully infested with lewd women as New Orleans. I do not say all were bad, but I dare to assert that three-fifths were dissolute and ready to lead our young men into their wily snares. If any party was demoralized, it was the untutored "greenies" from the farm lands of the west.

CHAPTER V

Our first trip, after arriving at New Orleans, was up the Mississippi River, some thirty-five or forty miles, being transported in river steamers.[12] We landed just before dark one night, but we privates were uninformed as to the object of the expedition. There we were, a brigade of infantry, alone; no artillery, no cavalry. At this point I think it is some six or seven miles across from the river to Lake Ponchartrain, and one of those almost impassable cypress swamps covering nearly the whole intervening space. We were marched back about three-fourths of a mile across a plantation next to the river, when we came to the edge of the swamp. It was now quite dark, and we were informed that we were to march across this swamp, which was at least five miles through, and intercept a train of cars on the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad. The Rebels had run a train down in there and were gathering whatever they could of forage and pressing men into the Confederate army.

It was the intention of our Generals to capture train, forage and men, if possible. Accordingly we plunged into the swamp and darkness overtook us. We soon found it necessary to hold our arms and ammunition high up to prevent them from being soaked in the filthy swamp water. We were waist deep, plunging along, climbing over logs or trunks of fallen cypress trees. Every now and then a big alligator would splash off, near at hand, from his perch upon some log. Oh, wasn't it fun, marching thus with no glimmer of light to guide us on our way, save the north star which we could see now and then above the trees. We made slow progress indeed. Some were nearly drowned by falling over in the swamp. Your humble writer was one of the advanced van. We at last, about midnight, neared

12. This expedition took place May 9, 1862.

the other side. I presume we were some thirty rods from the railroad when we heard the train coming like the wind. Some one had "squealed" upon us and they were informed of our intention. I, with several others, made a grand rush through the bushes (we had got on dry land again) toward the track; but too late, for when we were within perhaps ten rods of the track the train went whizzing by and the game was flown. Well, we were right glad to find solid ground again.

Along the margin of the lake, which was nearly a stone's throw on the other side of the railroad, the land was comparatively dry; enough so, to enable people to raise some inferior garden products. We were wet from head to foot, plunging through this terrible swamp in pitchy darkness, and our first thought was to find something to make a fire with. We found a cypress slabfence close by and soon we had a rousing fire. After tearing up some of the track, to prevent any further travel of trains during the night, and placing some of the slabs around the fire, we lay down with our feet to the fire and, I dare say, not five minutes elapsed ere I was as sound asleep as ever I slept under the home roof-tree.

In the morning I learned that quite an exciting incident had occured while I was asleep. A guard had been posted down the track toward Rebeldom—I think six men were on the post. Soon after they were posted a hand-car was heard approaching from toward the enemy. Our men commanded a halt; once, twice, three times, but the car still came on and our men could descry men upon the approaching car. About this time our men discharged a volley into the car, and they halted and our boys captured the car and its passengers. One man was killed, another mortally wounded and one or two but slightly. All the occupants of the car were hit with Minie balls from the guns of our picket men. I was also told that the wounded man was carried almost over my head in taking him from the car to an old house near at hand. I believe I was totally oblivious to every sense, being so fatigued from my march

in the fore part of the night. No matter what surrounding, or how great the danger, or how unpleasant the situation, the tired and weary soldier must have sleep; nature would demand obedience to her laws and we could not resist, even within a stone's throw of the enemy.

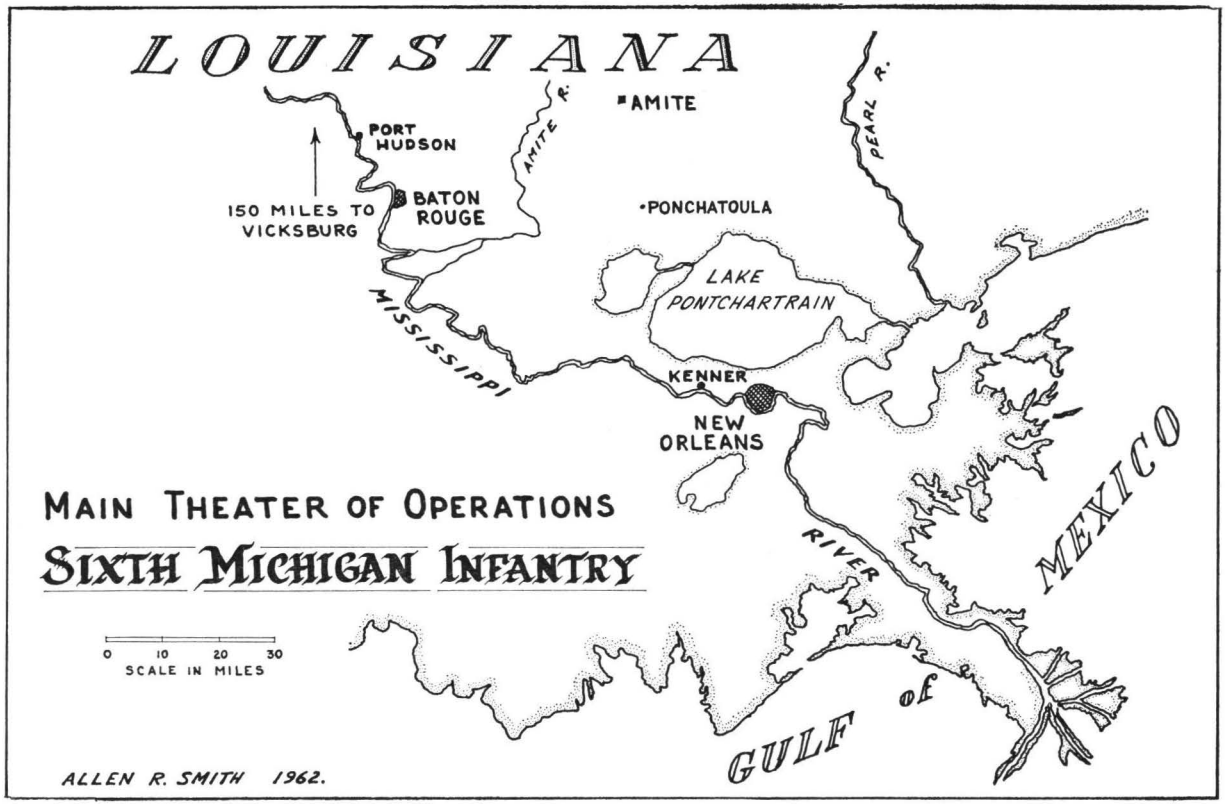
The morning came, and with it a busy lot of soldiers preparing the morning meal, consisting of army bread (commonly called hard-tack) and some salt bacon. After this was finished, we began the destruction of the railroad. Tearing up the rails; piling up the ties; putting rails across them and burning the pile, causing the heavy T rails to drop down on either side. Some of them were carried down into the swamp and sank into its deep and murky waters. We meant to be sure that the Johnnies did not follow us up and repair the damage easily. We took the hand-car with us in our retreat towards New Orleans and the wounded men were put upon it. One had since died, after being taken prisoner. I ought to have said the excuse these men gave for not halting was, they supposed we were their own men, guarding the track. They knew nothing of our advent in that region. It would have been better, it seems to me, if they had obeyed, even were it their friends who challenged.

Our retreat having commenced, track-breaking and trestle-burning became the order of the day. We had only seven miles of trestlework to cross over to reach a landing farther down the river where the transports awaited our return. Some fourteen miles in all to march. The sun poured down in most intolerable heat and many of the boys gave out by the wayside, and did not reach the landing until late in the evening. That was a fearful march over that trestle-work—in some places the ties were so far apart that we had to jump from one to the other. Many fell and were cruelly bruised on the timbers; some were sun-struck and some, like your writer, were tougher than "Job's turkey," and came through on time, even though the ordeal was a fearful one.

Thus the great link connecting New Orleans with the upper country, and the North was severed and remained

thus until long after the war closed. This ended the first reconnaissance of the Sixth Michigan in the far South. We embarked upon our transports and returned to Kennerville, a few miles above Carlton, on the river.[13] We were through with the first only to commence on the second, and in the succeeding chapter I will give you an account of our expedition up the river as far as Warrenton, Mississippi. In this reconnaissance we had one or two thrilling adventures, which I will try and picture to you as they really transpired. A soldier's life is not one to be envied always, as you will see by and by.

13. This was Kenner, La., where the regiment arrived May 10th.


LOUISIANA
AMITE
AMITE R.
PEARL R.
PORT HUDSON
150 MILES TO VICKSBURG
BATON ROUGE
PONCHATOULA
LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN
MISSISSIPPI
KENNER
NEW ORLEANS
MEXICO
RIVER
GULF of
MAIN THEATER OF OPERATIONS
SIXTH MICHIGAN INFANTRY
0 10 20 30
SCALE IN MILES
ALLEN R. SMITH 1962.

CHAPTER VI

Leaving Kenner we took transports for Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the capital city of the State, and were ordered to report to General Thomas Williams, then in command of the forces in that city. We were then sent on an expedition up the river to the lower end of the big ditch or great canal which was to change the course of the great river, and make the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, an inland town.[14] Our regiment was placed on two river passports, one not being large enough to carry the whole of us—and, escorted by two gunboats, we proceeded on our mission. If I remember rightly, the names of the boats that carried the regiments were *Laurel Hill* and *Ceres*. Company F, to which I belonged, was on the smaller boat, *Ceres*. We made the ascent of the river in safety, and arrived off the proposed ship canal. The levees were broken, and the whole country on that side of the river was flooded with water, and on the other, too, to some extent; enough so that we could find no dry footing upon which to build our camp fire to cook our scanty rations. We were compelled, therefore, to eat raw food or catch a minute's time in front of the arches under the boilers to warm through, not cook, our split peas and sow belly.

For days we remained and watched for the descending boats through the great canal. Gradually the water subsided and the canal went dry and no boats came. They dared not come around the bend by the city, for the Johnnies had fortified there, and denied the passage of Yankee boats. While we remained there some of the boys had an adventure over on a plantation which was flooded with water. They went over in a skiff to the house, and found it guarded by an old Rebel planter, who fired upon them and wounded

14. From Baton Rouge the regiment, under command of Col. Curtenius, went up the Mississippi on reconnaissance to a point five miles below Vicksburg. It returned to Baton Rouge on May 29th.

one of the boys. But they drove him off and had revenge by confiscating whatever they found of value to them; doing much damage after they were treated so coolly upon their advent at his home. Had he been kind to them no doubt they would simply have taken some fowls, as we were very hungry, being placed on one-fourth rations, in order to make rations last until our return to Baton Rouge.

We were hungry and thirsty and sick, and right glad were we when our small fleet turned down the stream on its return. For the first few miles we went along unmolested, although Rebel batteries from the bluffs could have persecuted us terribly. The larger boat, being the fastest, soon passed down out of sight; also the gunboats, and left the old *Ceres* all alone to its fate. We were just abreast of Grand Gulf, Miss., and thought not of danger, knowing the other boats had just passed, and if fired into we should have heard the firing, and also been warned of danger. All at once a masked battery of several pieces, six I think, opened fire upon us within musket shot. They were down on the flat and had level range at their prey. They peppered us with shrapnel and spherical case, which came crashing through our cabin, scattering glass and splinters of wood in all directions. But our men gathered on the lower deck, and the Johnnies shot pretty high. The cabin was literally riddled from stem to stern. We made all haste to speed down the current, and tarried not to see our friends on the landing. We had only one man wounded slightly with a flying splinter. How we all escaped is a wonder to me. I thought my time was about up, and so did many others. We had some colored women cooks on the boat, and I tell you they prayed to the good Lord lustily, making all sorts of promises if the Lord would spare them their lives this once. I guess we all thought of "kingdom come." Most any one would with those terrible shells shrieking, hissing and bursting around them, with no protection in the least from a terrible death; our craft liable at any moment to receive injuries sufficient to sink her in the murky waters of the mighty river, therefore there were many chances in our favor of being sacrifice to the monster

rebellion. But we believe in an All-wise Ruler of the universe, and are willing to ascribe to him the praise for our escape. We were soon out of range, down the stream, and very shortly met the forward boats returning to our assistance. We about faced and steamed up the river to give them another chance at us: but lo, we found they had gone from their position. A shell from one gunboat sought their former location, but no response came in return. We pulled up at the landing, and our boys stood on the land, and were eager to find Mr. Johnnie Reb, who had so cowardly treated us the hour before. Upon the hillside we saw a single person bearing a white flag, and his mission was for us to spare the town.

But we were bound to have some satisfaction for our wrongs. We pushed outside the town some distance in hopes to come up with the retreating battery, whose tracks were plainly discernible in the sand. But we failed to overhaul them, and returned to the town, where the boys commenced their work of "going through it," as they termed it; taking whatever they wished, for orders had been given to burn the town, and all would soon be in ashes. They were not long in doing this, then the torch was applied, and the town, consisting of perhaps twenty to thirty buildings, was soon in flames. Only one or two buildings remained to mark the spot where stood the once pleasant village called Grand Gulf City. This being accomplished, we re-embarked and were soon headed down the river again toward more friendly associates at Baton Rouge.

We passed the remainder of the voyage without anything of note transpiring that I call to mind. After this our fleet kept together and were not out of hailing distance. We did not care to be subjected to another ordeal like the one just passed through. I tell you, reader, of all places I was put in during the service, this, with another instance of the same kind, only more so, was the most unpleasant—no chance to meet the enemy; only to stand and take their fire, without replying. If we Michigan boys could only have been on the land, I tell you we would have made it hot for

those gunners to work their pieces. But we could not jump ashore from the middle of the Mississippi, and therefore there was only the one alternative.

In due time we reached Baton Rouge, a worn-out lot of men. Nearly all were sick from the severe test we had been put too. Quarter rations and only the muddy water of the river to drink so many days; some seventeen days in all. We were marched into the Government buildings; the old barracks and arsenal building belonging to the U. S., right glad to find shelter and food. But this was of short duration for the Sixth Michigan. In my next chapter I will give you the story of how we evacuated our quarters, and of honors won which gave our regiment the title of the "Bloody Sixth."

CHAPTER VII

General Williams had a pet regiment, known as the Ninth Connecticut, and he desired to place them in the barracks in our places. They were supplied with tents, while we had none; they had well men, while our men were sick. Nevertheless, an order was issued for the Sixth Michigan to move out and go into camp just outside of the city, with only their blankets to cover them. All of our field officers refused to obey this unjust command, and were placed under arrest and sent to New Orleans.[15] Finally the ranking captain of the regiment (I need not mention his name; all of the Sixth boys know whom I mean.) took command and marched us out, and the pet regiment marched in.[16] We were in for it now, and made the best of our situation.

We were marched out in the rear of the city, and went into camp at a point of timber land, where two roads leading out into the country branch out at different angles. Our camp was situated in the point where the two roads merge together. For our quarters we had the mossy woodland, and the overhanging boughs for our cover. Tents, we had none, and did the best we could with our oilcloth blankets to keep off the rain from our impromptu barracks, made from the boughs of trees and from the moss which hung from them. Nearly our whole regiment was on

15. See Robertson, p. 261, for this incident, which ended with Gen. Butler ordering the release of the officers sent to New Orleans. After the war Captain Edward Bacon, of Niles, wrote a book, *Among the Cotton Thieves* (Detroit, 1867) in which he discusses the incident from the point of view of the officers involved (chapters 1-2). In his account, including testimony from the court of inquiry, Bacon stresses Williams' dislike of volunteer officers and troops. Bacon also has bitter words for the General's "Order of Combat" drill.

16. This was Garrett J. Spitzer, Schoolcraft, Capt., 6th Inf., Aug. 19, 1861, resigned and honorably discharged July 13, 1863.

the sick list, and being thus exposed did not tend to help toward improving the health and strength of the men. But the old Sixth was gritty, and asked no odds of its more successful, though less competent rival regiments. It turned its back upon the city and its white-gloved occupants, and bravely faced the enemy, which soon after appeared.

Lizzards crept over us by day and by night. At first, thinking them poisonous, we shunned them as we would a pestilential plague. But we soon learned that they were of the inoffensive class, and would do no injury. They often made themselves quite at home in and around our bunks.

Well, reader, how do you think you would like this kind of life, in a country frought with danger on every hand? Houseless, homeless, sick, hundreds, thousands of miles from home and friends, expecting every day a host of enemies to sweep down upon you like a powerful prairie fire that speeds with the wind down upon the unprotected home of the western homesteader. Do not for a single moment imagine that the soldier's life was always like this. If you follow me through you will find that afterwards we fared better. But oftentimes we were surrounded by circumstances far from being enviable, and we endured our discomfort and unpleasant situation without a murmur of complaint or a single remonstrance with the Government for which we suffered. But to my story. We remained in these quarters in the open woodland for several days. Posting our inner and outer lines of sentinels, to protect ourselves from surprise. We knew that sooner or later a large Confederate force was coming down upon us, and, mind you, the Michigan boys did not intend to be found napping.

One night several comrades and myself were present on the outer line of sentinels, or picket post, as it was termed. The night was inky dark, and we were crouched under some branches close by the track of one of the principal wagon roads leading into the city, and it was expected that the Johnnies would come in on this road, when they came. The night had waned into the early morning—perhaps one or two o'clock. No alarm had been given us, though we had

expected every moment to hear Rebel cavalry coming down the road. Just at this time we were roused and ready for the signal of danger and a retreat toward camp. We distinctly heard the crashing of horsemen coming through an old by-road that led into the main road. With guns ready we waited the critical moment; when, lo and behold, a young steer came trotting along. It was well for that steer that we were in so important a post and dare not use firearms. I have wondered many times how that young "critter" ever came to be there. It must have strayed from some distance in the country, else it would have been boiling in the pot long before it gave us such a scare. This is only one of the episodes that happened during the war.

One night, on the inner line of sentries, we had quite a rumpus at this same camp. A hog came along, and our boys were fond of fresh pork, and could not resist the temptation; so one of their number leveled his musket and brought Mister Hog to a halt. No sooner did he do so, than bang, bang, bang, went the picket line, all along, and the whole force was turned out under arms to resist the incoming foe. A patrol was sent out and soon learned the cause. No one knew, however, who fired the first gun, and it was useless to try to find out from Michigan men, because they stood in together, and if not caught by some soldier from an eastern regiment, they never would convict themselves. It was policy; they were almost totally alone in the department; only two other western regiments, and they were sometimes far apart, Thus, time sped away, and the boys almost came to believe that no Rebel force would attempt to occupy Baton Rouge. They were doomed to be sadly disappointed, and that soon.

One morning about 4 o'clock the pickets commenced firing in good earnest, and return shots could be distinctly heard. The long roll sounded, and I will never forget that sound as long as life shall last. It was the first actual alarm, the precursor of battle which the Sixth Michigan had ever

heard.[17] I have stated that almost the whole regiment were on the sick list; but to a man we now find them in the company ranks. None so sick but he can spring to the rescue when deadly peril threatened the white-gloved occupants of the barracks. Only a few minutes intervene, and the regiment is marched to its battle line, in front of which is an open field, perhaps three hundred yards across. Firing is heard on our left. Word comes that a Massachusetts regiment has deserted its station and gone to the rear to join its forces with those seeking shelter under the immediate protection of the fleet. But there stand the Michigan boys (I am speaking of two or three companies now, F, C and A, I think) firm as steel, waiting for the foe. Not long, however, did we wait, for presently the enemy marched out in solid column on the other side of the open field, and we saw at a glance that they outnumbered us two to one, if not three. But we opened the salute and gave them a volley from our muskets. Then commenced a fierce conflict indeed. Nym's Massachusetts Battery, stationed on our left, gave them a cross fire. Two pieces of our own, belonging to the Twenty-first Indiana regiment, which they had captured previously, drawn by mules, were in the road near our camp, also opened fire. The mules became unmanageable and fled, like the cowardly regiment, to the rear, leaving the pieces to be handled by the boys. Well now, it was real hot about that time, all along the lines. They pressed forward, and we were forced to fall back under some cover from board fences, trees and stumps and hollows in the ground. At last they made a charge and took possession of our two pieces of artillery; but our men fought like fiends, though many were covered with blood. Wounded and dying on every hand; yet this roused their ire still more, and in my next chapter I will tell you the sequel.

17. This attack took place on August 5th, with the 6th Infantry companies under command of Capt. Charles E. Clark. Most of the other officers were under arrest at the time. General Williams was killed in this action.

CHAPTER VIII

The Johnnies cheered loudly and mounted the captured guns, but, although it was bravely done, yet it proved a hazardous movement. Only a moment did the colors of that Rebel horde wave over our guns before a well directed shot from one of the Company F men laid its staff and holder low in the dust. But bearer No. 2 mounted to his place and flaunted that Rebel flag in our faces. He like No. 1, received the same fate, and then bearer No. 3—presumptous mortal —did the same mean thing and followed in their train. About this moment a detachment of Company H, which had been still farther on our right and had met no opposition, came around and marched up from the rear to our assistance. This the enemy quickly perceived. We also gave a roar and charged the position. We took one piece back again and drove the enemy not only from the pieces but from the field. They turned and fled, completely routed.

We followed them to the wood and halted, being masters of the field. And oh! such a scene! Dead and dying in every conceivable shape scattered all over this entire field. One of my own comrades, a stout, heavy-built man in the prime of his manhood, lay on the field, shot through his body. In mortal agony he begged of his comrades to put a bullet through his head and free him from his terrible pain. But they could not, and so, for a brief time, he suffered none can know how much, and then gave up his life for his country. Others lay still in death. Others wounded, some perhaps mortally, some slightly. And when we fell back from our former position, prior to the battle, and occupied an old building on the outskirts of the city, ours was a sad company of men. But we were proud in this, we had met triple our numbers and held the situation. It was this battle that gained our appellation as the "Bloody Sixth Michigan."

Then came the task of caring for the dead, as well as for the wounded. We found color-bearer No. 3 with only

seven balls in his body, or through it, where he fell from the gun. Company F also captured the Rebel colors, taking them from the clutched hands of this daring Confederate soldier.[18]

We found, aside from our own men, sixty dead Confederates in the immediate front of our position. We lost quite heavily, but not equally with them. This force was led by General John C. Breckinridge against Baton Rouge. In the early morn he harangued his command, and said: "The Yanks are all sick in the city, and you will have an easy victory and eat your breakfasts there." They came on under this impression, without stopping to eat prior to their attack. Well, a goodly number of them did eat their breakfast in Baton Rouge, but it was of Minie balls and the dust of the earth.

Many a brave boy that wore the Gray laid down his life in the vain attempt to drive the Old Sixth Michigan boys from the forks of the road that morning. They came in before daylight, in the early morn, about half past four, and the battle lasted till near nine o'clock in the forenoon.

At a point in the attack just a little to the left of the position that our company held, the battle raged fiercely in a cemetery. At the close of the fight this city of the dead was very much demoralized. Beautiful tablets, erected in memory of the silent dead, were broken and torn from their settings. Beneath the soddy mounds reposed the silent slumberers; across them lay men whose life blood had ebbed away in the unsuccessful attempt to occupy the Capital City of Louisiana. It was indeed a sorry sight to witness. Such, reader, were the fortunes of war. Even the sacred resting places of the dead and the churches of the living God were not exempt from the terrible scourge of the great rebellion.

18. See Robertson, pp. 262-263, for details concerning this engagement. The colors taken were those of the 9th Louisiana, and they were subsequently sent Governor Austin Blair by Captain John Corden of Company F. It is of interest here that Johnson's account fails to mention the death of General Williams.

After this terrible battle, which tried the nerve and courage of our soldiers in the extreme, it was decided to adopt measures to protect our forces from any other attacks the Confederates might make upon us. We were again placed inside the arsenal grounds, and commenced to erect earthworks to shelter us from so exposed a position. A force was kept on the works day and night (for we expected the Confederates to return again at any time) until quite a formidable earthwork was constructed. Our field pieces were located at different points where they could do most effective service in case an attack was made.

Again the fortunes of war and our safety demanded that fully one quarter of the city should be burned in order to give open range for our artillery. The decree went forth to that effect, and the boys were given privilege to go through the dwelling houses and appropriate such articles as they found that would be of use to them. The houses had long since been deserted by their owners, as they did not care to remain in such warm quarters in case of another fight. They had taken most of the valuables that they could move handily, and the rest remained. Your writer was among the boys that went through those dwellings prior to their receiving the torch. Splendid mirrors from floor to ceiling, large and grand pianos, libraries filled with choice books (of which many went to Michigan), upholstered furniture, beautiful pictures, and much I cannot mention, remained. Some of the boys who had a prominent bump of destructiveness, seemed to enjoy the act of destroying these household treasurers, breaking mirrors with chairs, tearing pianos to pieces to see how they were made, etc. It did look pretty bad to me to see such splendid furniture demolished, but what mattered it? In less then half a dozen hours it would be cremated, and ashes would lie in its place. Toward evening, all being in readiness, the wind favorable, the work of firing the city commenced. Large and well furnished factories, commodious and elegant mansions, together with those many buildings of lesser importance were soon wrapt

in one solid mass of flame, and in the morning our coast was clear inland from the river.

In the river lay a strong fleet of gunboats, and we were now ready for fight No. 2. Our men had convalesced and regained their wonted color of cheek and elasticity of step, and rather courted something to dispel the monotony of camp life. Rumor often said that the Confederate forces were again marching upon Baton Rouge, but they failed to put in their appearance while the Sixth Michigan boys held the fort. They had tasted of their hash and didn't like they way it digested on that memorable fifth of August, 1862, and perhaps they were waiting until those Western men were relieved and other troops put in their stead before attempting the second time to occupy this desirable position on the great river. Not long were we destined to remain in the works at Baton Rouge.

Orders came for us to report at camp near New Orleans for general review by Major General B. F. Butler. Nearly the whole force of the Nineteenth Army Corps passed in this review, each brigade pausing in front of the General's position if he desired to address them. We do not want to boast, but we did feel proud when we old Wolverines were halted in the immediate front of the Commander of the Corps, and listened to his praise and great approval of the valor and service rendered by us at Baton Rouge, promising that the Sixth Michigan should receive reward for so nobly doing its duty. Weren't we proud then? But those white gloved fellows that supported the river bank while the fight was going on—how with them? They were publicly reprimanded by the Commanding General and their colors taken from them until such time, as they should redeem their reputation as true soldiers. They must have felt anxious about that time, I reckon. I think, however, that some time later they did do some good fighting, were reinstated, and won their colors back again. Good for them.

We were now ordered to take a position on the line

of earthworks erected as a defense to the city.[19] We were stationed on Mettarie Ridge, in the midst of a cypress swamp. In my next chapter I will give you an account of the battle we fought here, in which we came near losing all our entire regiment. The vicissitudes of war are truly various, and its changes terrible. 'Tis not all of the sweet to be a volunteer soldier I assure you, and, my fellow citizens of today, I would that you could only taste for one month such joys as we tasted at this camp. Then I think you would concede us our demands as just and well earned.

19. Baton Rouge was evacuated August 20, 1862, and the 6th, under command of Col. T. S. Clark, moved to Mettarie Ridge to guard the approaches to New Orleans.

CHAPTER IX

Camp Williams, or better known by the boys as "Camp Death," was situated on Mettarie Ridge, some six miles out from the city of New Orleans.[20] Passing out on the famous shell road leading to Lake Ponchartrain you file to the left some little distance and find yourself coming upon a slight elevation of land extending across the swamp from the river to the lake. On this line earthworks had been thrown up for the protection of New Orleans against any Federal force coming from inland while occupied by the Confederates. Since we held positions we used those same works for our protection from any advance from the Confederate army. When evacuated by the Confederate forces they had spiked all the huge guns with rattail files. Our men had rendered the same guns serviceable again, however, and held them to oppose their former possessors.

Well, enough of this, we found ourselves camped in the middle of a great swamp. Timber enough had been felled to permit of the erection of the works and some range outside. Mud ankle deep, almost pulling our brogans from our feet at every step. Oh, what a desirable place for habitation. We went into the swamp feeling pretty good, scarcely an animal sick. We pitched our tents among the slimy brakes and disagreeable odors that arose from the surface. To bunk on the ground was simply impossible, therefore we drove stakes in the soft earth and built our bunks up from the mud as much as possible. Ten thousand pests continually harrassed us day and night in the shape of monstrous mosquitoes and gnats. Our faces assumed the color and appearance of some pestilential plague. To sleep was sometimes an impossibility, and often times only utter fatigue could bring this solace for our sad condition. Water, water we wanted; yes, there was plenty of water near at hand;

20. The 6th moved to this camp on Dec. 6, 1862. It was so unhealthy that within a short time only 191 out of 755 men were fit for duty.

but oh, such filth as was contained in the waters of that swamp. Water was hauled to us in barrels from the city or from the lake or river. Sometimes this supply failed us and we were compelled to drink of this filth to quench the burning thirst that continually abided with us in that camp.

The enemy was flanking us every day, and came even into our most secret recesses and took us prisoners. We had no power to resist his onslaught. Even that awful solution of quinine failed to stay his progress. His slimy, cold, and merciless hand bore down upon us until we moaned in our anguish and prayed for mercy. Oh, that terrible enemy to the Yankee soldier in the Louisiana swamp, known as swamp fever, by his hand many comrades were stricken down in the midst of life and laid away under the accursed soil of the swamp. Far more preferable would have been open battle with the armed rebellion.

Day by day our forces weakened, and the sick list ran up to the hundreds. Scarcely well men enough for relief guard. Ask any living member of the old 6th if they remember Camp Death, and ten chances to one he will tell you its fearful perils are engraved upon memory's tablet as with a pen of iron. I wonder when I look back how any of us boys from the clime of Michigan ever escaped from the doom that hung over us in that hades of the swamp.

We begged of our officers for mercy; put us anywhere, only take us from this, the strong hold of the enemy that was laying our comrades by the score beneath the surface of this detestable land.

One afternoon the welcome tidings came, "the 6th Michigan are ordered to the city." Joy prevailed throughout the army; sick men hurrahed as loud as they could; hats went flying through the air, and a stranger in camp would no doubt have pronounced the 6th Michigan the crazy regiment. Our tents were struck, and together with our camp equipage, were loaded upon our old Government army wagons ready for hauling to New Orleans. One last long fond look upon our soldier home on Mettarie Ridge, and we crawled out from this loathsome abode, and turned

our backs upon it, never more to visit its locality again. To say we had no regrets in leaving this famous camp ground, would be false. Many, very many, of our dearly loved comrades we must leave behind. Their voices were hushed forever, and their once pleasant countenances were covered over with watery soil of the Louisiana lowlands. We had followed them with sad, sad hearts to their watery graves, and had marked their silent resting place with such means as we could command. Now we must go away, and there would be none to guard their silent home from desecrations by the enemies of loyalty.

We are out on the shell road and slowly and solemnly we march away toward the city. In due time we arrive at our new home, and find ourselves comfortably ensconced in far more desirable quarters. We occupy our old cotton-press building and enjoy the change greatly. New life comes back to our weary bodies, new vigor infuses a desire to live again, and perhaps in the bye and bye to return to home and mother.

Michigan men were always planning some device to get the innings on their officers; that is, such was the case with our Regiment. This old cotton press was surrounded with solid masonry brick walls eighteen or twenty inches thick, and presented a formidable barrier to the boys that would desire to leave camp for a few hours, without troubling the officers for a pass. Sentinels stood guard at the closed portals or entrance ways, and none could pass without a written pass, signed and countersigned. Only a certain number could obtain passes each day, and the regular routine was irksome and admitted of too much delay to suit our boys.

In one part of the building there was stored a large lot of sacks of salt, which, if I remember rightly were condemned stores and useless. The boys removed some of those sacks from over against the wall and commenced drilling for liberty. This was done unobserved by any of the officers, and at last an opening was made large enough to admit a man's body to pass through on his hands and knees. This

opening came directly into a citizen's pig-pen on an alley that ran out on to the main street, where all the officers were quartered, emerging directly in front of said officers' quarters. It became a great query how so many 6th Michigan men were out of camp each day or night perhaps, for they often crept out after taps, knowing the way very well, and came in at their leisure later in the evening or earlier in the morning, as it chanced to be. This was quite an accommodation to the boys and your humble writer may have probably availed himself of this avenue of escape from the dull ennui of camp life.

Our officers became convinced that the boys were playing truant and placed extra guards upon the walls and at the gates to detect the mode of egress and entrance. They failed, however, to unearth the secret in that manner, for our boys stood in together, especially on as good a thing as we had there. Some of our boys became indiscreet however, and after a time the officers detected the leak, found our "hole in the wall," and put masons to repair the break. We were now watched and several other attempts to burrow out were discovered and frustrated before completion.

Perhaps your humble writer may have been guilty of state prison offense, yet nevertheless he became an expert in imitating official hand writing, and being clerk of the company, making out the passes with the captain's signature. Often times double the men allowed passes each day were out on pass from Company F. Many times I have joked our Captain and said, "you cannot tell whether you signed those papers or not." "Oh yes," he could. He said I could not copy his capital C, but I did all the same and put him to the test and he could not detect the difference. This did not aid me materially, but in after time I came into possession of a standing provost pass, and did not have to resort to strategy in order to get outside of camp.

We enjoyed this camp right well, and soon the Regiment became efficient for duty again. We found while in the city this time that some of the malicious desire to wrong us had

been overcome, and we even found friends among the citizens. We must away from this cozy retreat soon. Away over in the Bayou Teche region there is reported a Rebel steamer loaded with cotton that will try to run the blockade and depart to other shores with her cargo.

In my next chapter I will give an incident of our expedition after the gunboat *Cotton,* as it was called. There were several little incidents worthy of note which have no doubt never appeared in printed columns. We shall see them in due time. Follow me.

CHAPTER X

It had been discovered that there was a leak over there. The Rebs had a steamer up in the bayou and were transporting cotton to the coast, where it was smuggled away to foreign ports. This would never do and measures must be taken to terminate this traffic. Hence the expedition consisting of a brigade of infantry, a regiment of cavalry and a battery of light artillery were transported from New Orleans across the river to the village of Algiers, where cars were in readiness to carry us to Brasher City on the bayou. In due time we were loaded and ready to proceed on our mission. Happy were the Sixth Michigan to get where they could breathe the pure air into their lungs, and see country where one could walk on dry land.

We arrived at Brasher City just before nightfall, and went into camp for the night; pitching our tents in an open space near the center of the town. Now the boys had had no chance to "reach" for anything good to eat in a long time, and their appetites for the delicacies like chicken, duck, beef and mutton were whetted to a sharp edge. As soon as the camp was established the next thing in order was reconnaissance. We soon espied a goodly number of fat ducks swimming in a small pond nearby and you ought to have seen the boys surround that pond, eager for the occupants. As fast as one could be shooed ashore it was run down and the possessor retreated for camp with his prize under his arm. At last only one poor little duckling remained and the contest became lively to see who should be the lucky one to obtain it. I know a fellow who did some tall running to capture this "secesh fowl," but at last came out the winner and proudly bore off the prize. Others of the boys were in other directions and came in from different points bringing in plenty of ducks and chickens. Soon the savory smell of pot-pie rose up from the camp and the Sixth Michigan had *one* good square meal. In the reconnaissance it was discovered that in a field near by there

were a hundred fat sheep (more or less) and the Michigan boys did not like lean mutton, neither did the eastern men with us. In the morning, mutton stew was served up in the camp and the officers of the Sixth had their share also of fresh mutton. I went over to the field next morning and saw the remnant of the flock. Only one poor, decrepit, old sheep remained to mark the spot where the ninety and nine had fallen victims to the ravenous appetites of Yankee soldiers. The ninety and nine did not remain with one gone astray, but the reverse; the one remained and the ninety and nine were gone to appease the hunger of the soldier boys.

One more little incident transpired here that comes fresh to my memory, and I insert it lest some dear comrade may say that I have failed to perform my duty in writing up the incidental history of the Sixth Michigan. Our boys were many of them very fond of honey, having been used from boyhood to sip its sweets from the home table. They espied a hive of bees not far distant from our quarters in a neighboring yard, and essayed to capture it and once more taste the sweets of the busy bee. Accordingly they laid their plans of siege and our advance was ordered at dusk, before it became very dark. They did not count all the cost I dare say, as the sequel will show. Two of them, a forlorn hope, charged on the hive, grappled it, and started in retreat, but not very far did they get ere the inmates discovered that Yankee soldiers were taking them prisoners and they came forth to the defense. They had a very decided dislike to our boys and attacked them fiercely. And for once the Michigan boys were compelled to retreat in disorder and utter rout. The enemy prodded them at every step until they were well away from the contested ground. This did not mean entire defeat to the boys, however. They fell back and reorganized and concluded to wait until darkness should obscure their movements. Again they came on to the ground and this time succeeded in carrying off the spoil, and they said that secesh honey was even better than Yankee honey. I can vouch that that honey was pretty

good, and even now I can see in my mind just how that hive of bees was situated in the garden. I can see the look of disappointment that rested upon my comrades' faces when they were foiled in their first attempt to procure the treasure, and also their look of pleasure as they ate the honey on new baked biscuit in the early morn. This seems like an indistinct dream now; but yet certain points of it are vividly engraved upon memory's tablet, and time can never efface them therefrom.

On the coming morning we are loaded upon bayou transports and proceeded up the sluggish bayou toward the rendezvous of the Rebel steamer.[21] Nothing of note transpired, that I remember, until evening. We were landed some distance below the objective point and commenced our march upon the enemy. We proceeded until nightfall and met no resistance. We found it inexpedient and risky to march farther in an unknown country, expecting every moment to meet an armed foe, until daylight came again. We were therefore halted in line of battle, our skirmish line out in front as we had been marching some distance, and told to rest on our arms for the night. No square meal, no tent to shelter us from an impending storm; no fire to drive away the chill and dampness of the nightfall.

The Sixth were just crossing a canefield and we were told to lie down, pull our *ponches* over us with our guns by our side, and make the best of it until daylight. Quite a reverse from the evening before. We lay down in the hollows between the hills of sugar cane, generally two by two, and your humble servant was soon as sound asleep as though snugly tucked in bed under the old roof tree. Not long, however, for the gathering storm soon culminated in a rain that poured down as though the flood gates of the clouds were thrown wide open at that very joint. Soon the hollows were little rivulets and we were perched upon the cane hills to keep from being carried away by the flood.

21. The expedition to destroy the Confederate gunboat *Cotton* began on January 14, 1863 under command of General G. Weitzel.

Oh, how delightful to be a soldier boy and fight for Uncle Sam. No more sleep, no more rest, for the boys that night. Drenched to the skin, weary and hungry, shivering with cold, we must anxiously await the coming morn in a standing or sitting posture. But dawn came at last, although it seemed an age, and again we proceeded on our march. We ate of hard tack in our haversacks, drank such muddy water as we could dig from the gutters, and called it the morning meal; no fire was lighted, no time to lose. We were told that the Johnnies were only a short way ahead of us, and marched on. I need not say that the Michigan boys showed some ill-temper, for they were confident that this usage was uncalled for and entirely unnecessary. But they sullenly obeyed orders, resolved to have satisfaction ere they returned from the Rebel country.

Joyfully we espied the smoke from the Rebel gunboat *Cotton,* and knew that we were near our journey's end. We did not anticipate any great amount of fighting, knowing that this was a cotton expedition. We were drawn up in line of battle, our field pieces placed in position, and cavalry sent out to reconnoiter. Soon word came that the Rebs were coming down to meet us. We saw the dark smoke roll up from the gunboat and could tell that it was nearing us. As soon as it came within range our artillery boys opened fire upon it, which was promptly returned, and we did not know but we were for a fight after all. This only lasted a few minutes, however, and the gunboat retreated by the bayou, again out of range. We had none killed, and none wounded by Rebel shell. Unfortunately we had had one terrible accident among our own men. One of the guns had been prematurely discharged as the powder cartridge was rammed home, carrying away both arms of the unfortunate comrade standing at his post doing his duty. I saw him as they led him to the rear and placed him in the surgeon's care. Poor boy, how sorrowful he looked; how his ashen lip quivered as he suffered the extremest pain from his fearful wounds. I never saw his face again, but in after time learned that he died from his terrible injuries. One

noble life sacrificed to appease the greed for cotton; not gold; cotton, you know, was king.

We remained in our line of battle and again night came on and we were in a cane field still. But this time under more favorable circumstances, for there were large shocks of the top of the cane in the field and we made use of them for bedding. Again we slept on our arms. During the night, some time perhaps about midnight, I awoke and looking up toward the retreat of the boat I saw flames darting upward toward the sky, and soon it was whispered around, "the gunboat *Cotton* is on fire," which proved to be correct. The Confederates saw that it was useless to try to evade the avaricious Yanks, and rather than have them secure the coveted prize, her cargo of cotton, they concluded to burn the boat and its cargo and retreat into safer quarters with Kirby Smith.

In the morning our officers told us the object of the expedition was accomplished, the Rebel gunboat destroyed and we would therefore return. We could see by their faces that disappointment lurked within their bosoms. They had failed to secure the most prominent object of the expedition.[22]

We were quite willing, however, to shake off the Louisiana mud from our brogans, which nearly took them from our feet at every step. The rain had made it terrible in the cane fields. In our retreat we took the main road leading down the bayou, with the cavalry guarding our rear.

22. This reference to cotton points up one of the problems for the Union command in the South: that of attempts by some Federal officers to realize personal gain from confiscated cotton. Col. Andrew J. Butler, brother of the Union commander in New Orleans, was said to be deeply involved in illicit transactions. This, the general denied, stating that his brother's profits amounted to "less than two hundred thousand dollars." David Donald and James G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (D. C. Heath; Boston, 1961), p. 486.

CHAPTER XI

On our line of march back down the bayou were several fine mansions, belonging to Rebel officers in the Confederate service, officers that had been engaged in the unjust warfare of hanging some of our scouts some time previously. We were eager for some chance to satisfy our desire for revenge in having been, as we thought, very needlessly put to this exposure and fatigue. We were told that we would be justified in reducing these same mansions to ashes, and we were not slow in so doing, leaving no vestige of habitation on those accursed plantations, whose owners were even then in the ranks of Kirby Smith's forces. Our brigade marched onward toward Brasher City. One could scarcely tell what place the Sixth Michigan occupied in the line. There was the color bearer and a few commissioned officers in position, the balance were on the forage line. Those eastern regiments marched in solid column, not a man allowed to straggle from his position. If one attempted it he would be forced immediately back into place. I saw officers even strike their men with swords. 'Twasn't a Michigan man, mind I tell you; if it had been the chances are his time would have been short to remain with the old Sixth.

We found no officer to restrain us from appropriating some of the secesh farm-yard poultry to our needs. I remember we came along to a large plantation, and as usual, the boys deployed as skirmishers went through the barn-yard, chasing the feathered occupants even to the door-sill of the mansion. Out came the occupants with tears in their eyes, begging that the Yankee soldier should spare them their fowl, saying that they were loyal Union people. "Oh no, Union people are you! How comes it that the owner of this plantation not long since assisted in the terrible crime of hanging some of our dear comrades, who were serving as scouts?" " 'Tis a mistake, he never done so, we are loyal citizens of the Union."

"Where then is the proprietor of this ranch?"

"Gone over a short distance for needed merchandise."

"Oh well, we understand, we've had this dodge played upon us until it's become stale, and we have no rations whatever," and on went the boys gathering in the game until it took two comrades with musket from shoulder to shoulder, game strung between them, to carry the confiscated secesh poultry. Late in the evening we arrived back, opposite Brasher City, and went into camp for the night. In the Michigan camp a good and savory supper was prepared, and the officers shared equally with the men. In the eastern men's camp it was hardtack and army bacon. Our men went to their rest with appetites fully satisfied, and felt no remorse of conscience in the least for having drawn their rations from the Confederate stores.

I remember how we pitied the poor comrades that had been compelled to march all day in the unbroken files, the dust seething up into their nostrils almost beyond endurance. They came into camp weary, discouraged, and nothing to cheer them or make the inner man thankful. We thanked our lucky stars that we did not have West Point men for our officers, and they (I mean the West Point officers,) no doubt thanked their lucky stars that they had men who dare not flinch from the strict discipline laid down upon them. I bethoughtme, 'twere far better for them to command eastern men, than to command our dare devil Michigan boys, for without doubt had it been a Michigan man struck over the head with a regulation sword the officer thus insolent would have fared the penalty with his life. We claimed to have souls, to have rights, as well as the field and staff, and commissioned officers over us. We can say with feelings of grateful thankfulness and pride that the commissioned officers of the Sixth Michigan were humane from first to last. To them we owe much for the leniency and opportunities given us to break rank and file to secure something besides our wormy hard-tack and crawling bacon, to appease our hunger after a long march from early dawn to dusk of evening. On the tablets of our memory are engraved grateful remembrances which we

shali carry to the other shore. Sometimes we got off our balance and accused our officers of trying to make financial gain out of us, but we generally found that proper hints from our ranks brought them to their senses, and generally we escaped the pending doom.

We broke camp the next morning and crossed to Brasher City, where we took the cars to Algiers again and were soon speeding along for our old camp ground at and near New Orleans. In due time we arrived at the city and our Regiment was stationed at Kennerville and Carlton, some 18 miles above the city. While at Carlton we enjoyed the camp life very pleasantly.[23] We drew in large cat-fish from the river, picked berries from the dew-berry bushes near-by, and rested from active service. This was not very long however, another expedition was hatching up for us, and I'll tell you how and where after a little.

I want to relate a circumstance in regard to a little incident with a sutler, a Jew that came up from the city. I think it was at this camp if I remember rightly, at any rate this was a fact that transpired in one of our camps near New Orleans. A Jew sutler came up and obtained permission to sell goods in the camp of the Sixth Michigan. We had not long to wait to see that we were paying three prices for everything we purchased of him. We remonstrated; all to no purpose, however; he seemed bent on robbing us, and took advantage of our necessities, which soon aroused the ire of the Michigan boys, and they conceived a plan to reimburse themselves for money advanced, and also to rid themselves of the pest. One evening just after parade, it was whispered around, "we are going to make our advance and raid the Jew sutler." Quietly the boys gathered in the vicinity of the sutler lodge or tent, and one could see mischief in their eyes. A comrade assayed to make a bargain with him for something, and as usual the cut-throat price was demanded. The comrade remonstrated, telling

23. Carlton was apparently the site of Camp Parapet, where the 6th was part of the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division, 19th Army Corps.

him of his unfairness. He (the Jew) then saw there was something in the wind and withdrew into his den, closing the portals. This signal is given and sharp knives cut the guyropes at every stake. Instantly the mammoth tent collapsed upon the sutler and his wares, and a score of strong arms reach under for the precious goods. Mr. Jew crawls out, after a moment's time, only to see his costly merchandise vanishing in every direction. Boys carrying it by the armful to secret hiding places. He wrings his hands in untold agony and implores the boys to desist. But it is too late now, the ball is opened and the figure cut. He hurries to the Colonel's tent and makes his pitiful appeal to him.

The Colonel comes over to the scene of the late sutler lodge to stop the boys in their business of manipulating the sutler's goods. Where; oh where, are they now? all is quiet, not a scamp of them to be seen; all are in their quarters meekly attending to their camp duties. The fallen lodge is removed, and only empty boxes are revealed. The goods have been disposed of at a bargain and the boys stand in. Some little action is pretended toward searching for stolen goods, but nothing is revealed from its secure hiding place. The officers return to their quarters, and the disconsolate Jew moans audibly and taunts our boys as being thieves and robbers. They have not been used to such harsh names and soon decide on a plan to put a stop to the repetition. Four strong comrades approach Mr. Sutler, and you will observe that they are dragging something in their rear which proves to be a stout army blanket. In a twinkling the Jew finds himself in the middle of said blanket, and with sprawling legs and flying arms he leaps high up toward the sky, and with fearful velocity returns earthward again, only to find himself on the upward flight again; higher, still higher, with long hair streaming in the evening breeze; hatless and shoeless he makes his aerial flight, and swiftly returns to the loving embrace of the trusty friend, the army blanket. Several times he performs his wonderful feats to the great amusement of scores of Michigan boys, now gathered to witness the finale of the programme. Then the question is

propounded: "Jew, will you pledge us your honor as an honest man to quit our camp, and never set foot in it again." He threatens to have revenge and again he gyrates from earth heavenward; up, up still more high, and as he returns to the blanket again the breath is nearly driven from the body of this detestable object claiming to be a man. Shortly he is given time for reply to the proposition, and this time he is not long in expressing his desire to depart peaceably from the camp. The boys conducted him to the guard line, admonish him if he values his life to depart, and never show his face again to a camp of Michigan men. He is given a parting salute in the form of a lift in the boot and shoe trade and sent on his way rejoicing.

This is the way our boys adjusted their wrongs with Southern Jew sutlers, and the officers could never bring the culprits to justice, for the whole regiment was *en masse.*

In union there is strength. They were not down there to be robbed by Southern citizens, and were ever equal to the emergency. Boys, what did you get out of that old Jew's store that time? I got some canned goods, and they tasted just as good as though I had paid him three times their value.

In my next chapter I will commence a reminiscence of the expedition to Ponchatoula, La., out on the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern railroad.

CHAPTER XII

I will not preface the chapter with unnecessary comments, but will immediately put the regiment on the march out over that same old seven mile trestle-work again, where many a comrade received scars which he carries to this day, if living. If I remember correctly Col. Bacon, of Niles, Michigan, fell between those fearful timbers and fractured his fifth rib. How is it, Col., do you remember the circumstance?[24] Some of the boys got dizzy, and imitating the native alligator, plunged head foremost into the mud and water and were rescued from a fearful death with great difficulty by their comrades. I do not know whether there was any solid bottom to this morass or not. I rather think the bottom had long since fallen out. I happened to be one of the lucky ones and did not explore the hidden depths of this slough of despond.

By and by we arrived on the farther side and found terra firma, and we halted to call the roll and count the missing, care for the wounded, and satisfy the inner man with some solid food, hard tack and water. That was all we could carry with us, our rations having gone around on boats by the way of Lake Ponchartrain.[25] Well, we found after a careful count that we had not sustained any severe loss, farther than a good amount of strength and some minor accoutrements and regulation muskets, which had been planted in the morass. The boys were told that these would be charged up to them and the amount taken from their

24. Edward Bacon, Capt., 6th Inf., Aug. 19, 1861, Lt. Col., Aug. 8, 1862, Col., Feb. 1, 1864, honorably discharged Oct. 16, 1864. In his account, *Among the Cotton Thieves,* Bacon does not mention injury to himself on this expedition, see pp. 47-53.

25. The account which follows is of the expedition to Ponchatoula, March 23, 1863, under direction of Gen. Weitzel. The 6th Inf. was then commanded by Col. Thomas S. Clark, Monroe.

next pay. This might have been done perhaps if the boys had been in need of arms at next pay day, but somehow the Sixth Michigan boys generally managed to have guns when they needed them, and when pay day came they produced the very identical guns lost in the passage of the swamp. I am not going to accuse them of being guilty of larceny, for I don't believe a Sixth Michigan man ever stole anything he could not carry. They only kept themselves good in the requirements of armament, and it was to be presumed that the Government furnished them with arms and accoutrements, and the officers generally asked no questions. Why should they, 'twas none of their business how we obtained our guns if we only had them, and in good order for service.

We marched on out on the railroad some few miles farther and camped for the night in some deserted houses not very far from where we had at the previous adventure tried to intercept the train of cars going northward. We were joined here by a detachment from another regiment. The following morning we pushed on for the great pass connecting the two lakes, Ponchartrain and Maurepas. A detachment of men was left in our rear to guard against surprise from that quarter, and we marched on to the pass. In due time we came to a jumping off place in the railroad. Before us lay a filthy looking channel which had been spanned by a railroad bridge, now burned to prevent trains from running down near New Orleans, either to carry off forage or bring in Confederate troops. We are told that this is South Manchac pass, and for the present our camping ground until special arrangements are completed for our further advance on Ponchatoula. We find dry ground on the bank of the pass and on the railroad, but only a stone's throw in our rear the muck stagnant waters of the swamp are waist deep. Splendid place for a home; beautiful scenery; lovely surroundings.

We immediately commence the formation of our hamlets, making thatched houses in this manner: Driving stakes in the soft earth, then stretching telegraph wire upon them,

into which we wove the wide leaves of the native palm. I assure you we were good mechanics, and pleasant cottages rose up like mushrooms of a single night, and soon a thriving village spread out along the forest pass. In a day or two vessels arrived in the pass from Lake Ponchartrain, bringing commissary stores and rations, ammunition, etc.

I should say that the Sixth Michigan was not alone.[26] There were detachments from several eastern regiments with us, and all told we made up quite a formidable army of invasion into the enemy's domain. I must not dwell too long on our camp life here, but proceed to the active part of our expedition.

One fearful stormy morn we were ordered to quit our comfortable cottage homes and embark on a small boat that is to transport us across the Lake Maurepas, up the Tickfaw river to Wadesborough, some three miles distant from Ponchatoula. We had to embark from the timbers of the bridge as there was no landing, and to get off we must climb on board from the bridge, a portion of which still remained. The wind blew a perfect blizzard and the rain came down in torrents, completely drenching us to the skin. We were used to such usage however, and did not mind it much then. Since we have reaped the sad results from such exposure. I thought surely I should be blown off into the water before I could gain a footing on the deck of the craft, but as I am generally in luck I got safely on board, as did all the boys, after some little delay. Other troops were transported across the passes, for there were two of them, north and south pass, with an island between, and they were to march out on the railroad to attack the Rebel position, while we were to come up on the flank from Wadesborough, landing on Ponchatoula Creek.

26. Other units with the 6th were several companies from the 165th New York Vol. Zouaves, 127th New York, 14th and 24th Maine. The expedition also had two rifled field pieces manned by a unit of the 9th Connecticut. The 6th saw action March 23-25, and took a number of prisoners. Its own losses were nine wounded. See Robertson, pp. 263-265 for Col. Clark's report.

All being in readiness we steamed away on our mission, and soon entered the mouth of the Tickfaw river, or bayou more like. We proceeded slowly up this turbid stream through the dark recesses of an impenetrable swamp. Hundreds of alligators swam upon its surface which our boys tried in vain to perforate with their musket balls. They would slide off from every old snag above the water and swim in front and rear of us in close proximity. Some of the boys tried to count their number, but gave up the job after reaching the hundreds. The overhanging branches of the forest trees would sweep the deck of the craft and come near taking some of our comrades into the unfathomable depths of the logy stream. Hats were lost and several articles of wardrobe. We wound and unwound, twisted and turned, backed and went ahead, and finally branched off into Ponchatoula Creek, and here we are in sight of Wadesborough.

The landing was soon made and we found ourselves once more out of the swamp land of Louisiana and stood upon sandy soil, upon which grew stunted pines. Our skirmish line was thrown and we advanced in column, We were not very far into the pine timber before our skirmish line in the front was putting in some lively music. Rapidly the report of shots came to our ears, and exchange shots were also distinctly discernible. We were ordered into line of battle and advanced by the front, expecting a general engagement every moment. Our skirmish line kept advancing steadily and we closely followed them. When only a short distance from the village of Ponchatoula we came out upon the railroad again and looked up and down to gain a view of the forces that were to join us at this point. No Federal soldiers are in sight and the Michigan boys are eager to push on and gain possession of the town. This they resolved to do, and acted accordingly. Occasionally a Johnnie loitered and gave us a shot as we advanced, but we pushed on into the village, on, through, and out on the other side. As we were passing through among the houses one Reb gave us a short range shot and ran, and our boys

gave him hot pursuit, but failed to nail him as he disappeared among the scrub pines and was lost sight of in a moment. We were advancing by the front in line of battle a little distance out of the village in the pine timber when we saw, in our front, cavalry moving by the flank. Instantly we took positions behind pine trees and opened up a brisk fire as we caught now and then a glimpse of the enemy. We thought we had a job on our hands, that we were in close proximity to the main Rebel force—and where were our supports that came up the railroad—nothing had been heard of them as yet. In a few seconds we were happily disappointed, for an officer rode plainly into view, and we saw he wore the blue.

It proved to be a force of Federal Cavalry which had been brought up from another point and we knew nothing of them. Luckily no one was hit, although the cavalry boys said some of the balls whistled rather unpleasantly near their position. They had also cut off the retreat of some of the Rebel force and captured them, among which were fourteen Choctaw Indians, belonging to the Louisiana Choctaw Battalion. Our force now fell back on the town and occupied the deserted village. Still no appearance of the force from the railroad side. Our Colonel dispatched a messenger down the track, informing them that we occupied the town, and for them to come up as soon as possible.

Our boys then as usual began to forage. The Post office was raided and the boys had much fun reading Rebel letters, and among them were some I called rather obscene. They also found a whiskey and tobacco shop. Canteens were filled with the stuff that stole their brains away, and their arms were filled with the large navy plugs of tobacco. Of this they had enough and to spare, leaving some on the railroad ties for the eastern men when they came up. I know its a shame to tell it, but the Sixth Michigan were nearly all crazed by strong drink in a short time, and if the Rebels had come, even in a small number they could easily have captured the whole command. I did not imbibe, and

was fearful lest some sad trouble should come upon us ere the morning dawned.

CHAPTER XIII

I left the Sixth Michigan the worse for whiskey, in a Rebel country, miles from any strong force of Federal troops. They occupied houses and barns and even the lodge room of the Masonic fraternity for their quarters.

The eastern men arrived late in the day and also occupied such quarters. Our men took many of the fixtures from the Masonic Temple, but soon orders came for them to be restored and not molested more. We could sleep in the hall, but we must keep hands off the pictures, charts, and paraphernalia of the room. Everything was restored and the lodge room placed in proper order on the following morning. I presume there were members of the fraternity among our own men; in fact I know there were quite a good number of them. Just before evening a detail was sent out on the railroad toward Rebeldom, with orders to burn a bridge some three miles distant, and thus prevent the Confederates from transporting forces by rail to our very camp limits. The bridge was rendered impassable, and soon various rumors were afloat; some said the Rebs were coming down by the train load and getting off just on the opposite side of Ponchatoula Creek, where we had destroyed the bridge.

They failed to put in their appearance that evening nevertheless, and in the morning the old Sixth was itself again and ready to meet any emergency. The confiscated tobacco was divided up among the comrades who had none but used the weed. The day was passed in confiscating whatever was of value, such as rosin, turpentine, cotton, etc., to the boats at Wadesborough. This was quite a lively day for speculators; as far as I myself was concerned I found it somewhat dull. The evening shadows crept over the ravished village, and still found the Yankees holding the position. Nothing of note transpired during the night.

In the morning messengers came from the bridge with the news that the Confederates were unloading by the train

load at the shoe factory about a mile farther on. It is quickly decided to evacuate the town with the main force, leaving a strong outpost or picket to hold the place until driven out by the enemy. Accordingly, word is sent for the boats to retreat into the intricate labyrinths of the swamp, and back to Manchac pass. We are to march back on the railroad and hold in check any attempt of the enemy to move on the camp at Manchac pass.

We are soon marching along the railroad in our retrograde movement. We pass several quite strangely built works where the Confederates had disputed the advance of our men sent out on the railroad to co-operate with us in the capture of the bonanza at Ponchatoula. We do not wonder now at their tardiness on that eventful day. We came to the edge of a great marsh several miles across, through which the railroad passes, and pausing a moment to rest we are shown the identical tree from which a single Johnnie hid among its branches held scores of men in check for several hours. There was no approach to his position save along the open track of the railroad. On either side the morass was impassable, and the men did not like the idea of risking dear life with no chance to deploy on the enemy's position. He (the Johnnie) had a good rifle of long range and sure aim, and somewhat verified the Bible history that one man put to flight a thousand. There were also quite formidable barricades built across the track at the very point where the hard land merged into the marsh. This position was held by the enemy until after our occupation of the town, when they retreated to safer quarters than those were, with the Sixth Michigan in their rear. Then the boys on the railroad moved on and joined us as stated. After resting a few minutes and looking over the situation our men were in while trying to join forces, we continued our march along the railroad track to the southern side, and at evening halted on the railroad just in the edge of the cypress swamp. We commenced at once to make ourselves as comfortable as we could in such a place. On either side of the track mud and water was waist deep; pretty narrow

limit for a camp, yet we managed it after extending some half mile in length.

Now we must at once erect, as the Rebs did on the far side, a barricade to defend our position behind if the Rebs advanced upon us. The darkies and quite a good many soldiers set to work and soon a huge pile of ties were placed across the track and rails placed in front to divert any shot or shell from Rebel guns. We had no artillery with us, but you know Yankees are said to invent many devices unparalleled in history during the Civil War. By some means the boys obtained a piece of sheet iron smoke-stack about the size of a ten-inch Columbiad. This was duly mounted upon the top of our fort and some comrade thoughtfully furnished a piece of oilcloth, (black of course) and the size of the bore of the heavy gun was cut out, and this was fastened over the muzzle of our smoke-stack siege gun, and to any one in the distance coming from Rebeldom, would surely impress them with the belief that the Yanks had transported a heavy gun from the pass and mounted it here. Well, we all gave three cheers when our gun was in position and ready for use. In the morning our front presented quite a warlike appearance, for we were to remain for further developments and had about faced and fronted toward Ponchatoula.

We were not quite sure whether our position was impregnable on the flanks or not; some thought not; therefore scouts were sent out to reconnoiter and post us up in those matters, quite essential to our small force. They soon returned and said nothing but alligators could flank us. No mortal man could traverse the swamp. I remember going out toward the village the next afternoon across the marsh into the woodland along with several other comrades in quest of fresh meat. We scouted through the pines, and presently I saw two young calves running along parallel with each other, perhaps twenty rods away. I drew up my old musket and fired, the ball passed through the back of one animal and entered the neck of the other, bringing both down at one shot. We quickly took the hinder quarters and

were about starting to return to camp when we heard firing in the direction of Ponchatoula. I tell you the grass did not grow under our feet as we sped for the railroad and the marsh. Just as we arrived at the railroad a hand-car came down bearing some of our wounded comrades upon it retreating toward camp, and we learned that the enemy had advanced upon the village, driven our men out, and occupied the town, and that they were driving our strong picket fast down the railroad rapidly toward us. We sped on over the marsh and arrived safely in camp again, thanking our stars that we were not gobbled up while foraging. We hung on to our veal all the same and had a good square meal all around. Our pickets were driven in and came across the marsh to our fort.

A council of war was held in the evening, and it was decided to evacuate our stronghold and retreat on Manchac pass. Therefore as soon as it became fairly dark we struck camp and commenced the march by night along the narrow railroad bed toward the pass. There had been a storm brewing and soon the rain came down in torrents, wetting us until not a dry thread remained upon our bodies.

We marched until after midnight, when we were halted to rest until daylight. Oh, what a delightful inn to rest in; I picked out the widest railroad tie I could find and laid down upon it, drawing my oilcloth (which was a poor excuse) over me. The rain still poured, but tired nature could or did not resist sleep, and soon I was off into a sound slumber and woke only when the open day dawned upon us.

We soon resumed our march again and did not rest until we arrived at the north pass. Here we again went into camp and made our palm leaf cottages, for we were to remain here and guard the pass for some time at least. I shall narrate several incidents that transpired here in the next chapter of my serial. One prominent one being the burning of the gunboat *Barataria,* at the mouth of the Amite River. We had the narrow space along the railroad, and close to the bank of the pass, upon which to establish our homes, and I assure you that some of our habitations were indeed

cozy and desirable. Uncouth and rustic as they may have been they served our purpose to protect us from the storm and the burning heat of a tropical sun. Some of them were indeed masterpieces of Yankee ingenuity. With pride I remember the one I resided in.

My comrades in arms, have you forgotten our home among the brakes and alligators? Have you forgotten the beautiful landscape spread out before you in that accursed swamp? Have you nothing in your body or system today to remind you of this beautiful Southern retreat at Manchac pass? What makes you shrug your shoulder and say, I wonder what makes that quick pain dart to and fro through my body? Why do you put your hand to your brow and say what makes this fearful pain that is crushing the life out of me, causing the brain to refuse to do its once powerful work?

I look back as I write and almost imagine myself tonight in those far away resorts so fraught with peril to us in the days of our soldier brotherhood. My heart beats fast and my eye grows dim as I recount the sad events that intervened in those camps amid the swamps of Louisiana. Today our comrades lie in unmarked graves; forgotten, unhonored, although they offered up their lives upon the Nation's altar. Would that I could once again visit those old camp grounds.

CHAPTER XIV

One morning, shortly after our establishing camp at the North pass a detail of volunteers was called for to go on board the gunboat and accompany the marines in an expedition up the Amite River, after some lumber to construct quarters for the officers.[27] "Lumber" was the name they gave the object at any rate. Accordingly, the required number of volunteers was quickly raised, your writer among them. I think there were twenty men volunteered from the Sixth. The boat which was to carry us was called a gunboat, an iron-clad one at that. It was covered with boiler-plate iron, proof against musket balls, but not proof against solid shot from artillery. Therefore the boys came to call them "Tin Clads." This boat was called the *Barataria,* and we called it the "Terrier." Whether it was Scotch, English or Yankee I am not able to decide. I think it was not much of a terror to anybody, surely not long after we embarked upon it on its fatal expedition across the lake to the mouth of Amite River. For its armament it carried I think four or six twelve-pound brass guns.

Everything being ready, Col. Clark took his volunteers and went on board the gunboat, and we soon steamed out of the pass and headed across the lake for the Amite River, some twelve miles distant. We anticipated no danger, but thought to have a pleasure trip for the day and return to camp feeling greatly relieved of the monotony of camp life, among the alligators, lizzards, and terrible insects that infested our most secret recesses. Onward we steamed in our bold and warlike craft, with nothing worthy of note until we arrived at the entrance of the channel. Here we met our fate in the form of a cypress snag, hidden underneath the

27. This Amite river expedition took place on April 7, 1863 under command of Col. Thomas S. Clark. Although Johnson does not mention it the 6th also took part in another raid to the Amite and the Jackson railroad, May 9-18, destroying $400,000 in property.

surface of the water. The pilot not being very familiar with the channel got a little to one side, and we were snagged. Long and faithfully we worked to get loose from our moorings. Being only some fifty or sixty yards from the beach, we were within easy range of infantry and began to feel somewhat uneasy. But we were in for it, not an inch could we move. We had a large yawl boat with us and a small skiff, and a canoe. It was decided to send some of the men ashore in the yawl and procure a long stick of timber from the beach and put it down in front of the boat endwise, attach a tackle and blocks to the upper end and try to lift off the bow of the boat from her moorings. Several men volunteered to do this perilous duty and went over to the shore, secured the timber, and were returning, dragging it through the water, lashed alongside the yawl, when several shots were fired from the timber near by, which resulted in wounding one of our boys in the arm, completely shattering the elbow.

Our boys on the boat sprang forward out of the ironclad portion of the boat and manned the howitzer on the bow, trailed it on the woods from whence the shots were fired (and they came quite lively for a few minutes) and gave them a return salute. This served to check their ardor somewhat, and after one or two shots of grape they ceased firing. Well, we did feel "kinder streaked" after that, I reckon. We put down the timber all the same and gave our project a thorough test, lifted and tugged, puffed and blowed, all to no purpose. It was merging fast toward evening, and we had been here nearly all day. There was a road along the river where artillery could be brought down to close range unobserved. We had one good gun commanding this road, but in the darkness the enemy might attack us from the wood again and perhaps board us from small boats in the obscurity of the night. We threw the gun forward overboard, in hopes to lighten up enough to raise her off. Still we hung as secure as ever. Our Colonel and the commander of the boat held a council and decided to abandon the "Terrier" to its fate. There were thirty-three of us all told,

officers, crew and soldiers. One man was placed in the canoe, two men in the skiff, and thirty men in the yawl. We were twelve miles from camp, with the lake to cross. Providence seemed to smile upon our sad lot and stilled the water of Lake Maurepas until not a ripple scarcely moved upon the surface. The two comrades in the skiff were detailed to remain in our wake and fire the boat lest it fall into the hands of the Rebs. We put the wounded comrade in the center of the yawl, then we seated ourselves around on the gunwale, the edge being perhaps about two inches above water, and rowed away from the old tin-clad.

When we had stood off perhaps a mile and a half we rested on our oars to watch coming events. The boys who remained to fire the boat having poured oil and turpentine on the lightwood and applied the match, and seeing it well started, jumped into their skiff and rowed out after us. We saw in a few minutes that their task had been well done, for the fire spread rapidly. In a short time the guns, which were charged to the muzzle with grape and canister, went off with a terrific boom, steam pipes exploded, and soon the fire reached the magazine, and one loud report sped over the water and the ill-fated gunboat was among the things of the past. We were still in those small open boats twelve miles from camp in the darkness. We had only the one alternative left to escape from the hands of the Confederates, and that avenue across the water. We accordingly stood away for the pass with our three open boats. We made very good time, and near midnight we hailed in sight of our quarters. Lanterns and torches were hurrying to and fro and we did not fully understand what should cause such a commotion in camp.

We found upon arriving that the boys were gathering up all available boats to come to our rescue. They had heard the firing during the day, had seen the fire at night, heard the explosions, and thought that we were having a "right smart" engagement, so were preparing to come to our rescue. Right glad were they to receive us back again, and very happy were we to skip to our rustic homes thanking

our stars that we had been successful in escaping from our perilous position at the mouth of the Amite River. The wounded comrade suffered severely, and was conveyed to our camp hospital as soon as we arrived. On examination it was found impossible to save the shattered arm, and the surgeon amputated it above the elbow. Thus sadly ended our pleasure excursion up the Amite River.

We remained some little time at this pass, guarding the only approach by land upon New Orleans. We caught fish and turtles and lived very well considering our surroundings in this swamp. While we were encamped here our superior officers got into quite a wrangle and several court-martials were ordered. I will not go into details of that part of the history. It was not my design in the beginning and I will stick to my topic—personal incidents with the regiment. We had quite formidable earthworks erected here and were prepared to "hold the pass."

One day, some little time after our adventure, a schooner was espied away across Lake Maurepas and one of our lieutenants got permission to give chase in some rowboats —the yawl we came home in I presume. I did not go this time, and can say nothing more than our men failed to capture the secesh schooner, and got into the swamp somewhere. Some of them were taken prisoners and some escaped after a perilous season in the swamp. I presume some of my comrades, if living, know more of this adventure than I. Nothing farther of note occurred while we remained at Manchac pass that I call to mind now. The Confederates I believe did raise one of the guns of the ill-fated "Terrier," and carried it inland, and lest I forget I will mention here the fact that after the surrender of Port Hudson, we found said gun in the fort, and again possessed the same old piece we fired from the bow of the gunboat when they came down upon us.

Once more we march out of the swamp and find ourselves in camp on the river bank. Soon however, we are to enter active service in earnest. Little did we know of the terrible ordeal before us. Perhaps it were best that we should

not know of the near future in those days. We made the best of our relief from the swamp and time passed swiftly while we were on solid ground. This was our last experience in swamp life, and hereafter we shall tread on "terra firma."

CHAPTER XV

We soon received orders at Kennersville to join Bank's army and proceed to Port Hudson.[28] Again we went on board a steamer and were transported up the river as far as Prophet's Island, some three and a half miles below the Rebel stronghold, and were landed at Springfield landing and marched in the rear of Port Hudson. We marched through sand and dust, and at nightfall found ourselves very near the enemy's line.

We encamped the evening of the 26th of May, 1863, in a piece of woods only a short distance from our foes. The officer commanding the division, Gen. T. W. Sherman,[29] desired a reconnaissance during the night in order to find out the strength and position so far as possible of the enemy's artillery. Of course we were just the ones for such perilous duties. Well, Captain Corden of Company F, was detailed with his company to make the reconnaissance. We ate of our scanty evening meal after a tiresome march, rested only a few minutes, then when the darkness covered our movements we climbed a rail fence at the skirt of the woodland and slowly and cautiously advanced over an open field toward the enemy's works. We bent low as we advanced in order to see our footing as much as possible, and

28. The siege and subsequent fall of Port Hudson, which Johnson discusses in the following pages, was perhaps the most important campaign for the 6th Michigan. The capture of Port Hudson came within a week of Grant's success at Vicksburg (July 3, 1863), and Union control of these two important objectives gave the United States command of the Mississippi. For details of the 6th Michigan at Port Hudson, May 24-July 9, 1863, see Robertson, pp. 265-267, and any of the many military histories of the war.

29. Thomas W. Sherman, Rhode Island, was a West Pointer, class of 1832. He served as Captain in the Mexican War and was a Brig. Gen. Vols., May 17, 1861.

also pass below Rebel bullets if they should come unexpected. We had gone some little distance, not a sound having escaped us, save the occasional breaking of a twig, as we expected every moment to meet some unseen danger. The night was very dark and we could scarcely discern our right hand comrade. Zip, bang, and a flash, almost in our very faces announces the fact that we are right upon their picket lines. Old Cap whispers "lie down," and I tell you in a jiffy we were flat as flounders, expecting more shots to follow immediately. None followed though, and we lay there and heard the long roll in the Rebel fort; heard the officers turning out their men hurriedly, saying the Yankees were upon them, heard them order their field pieces to the rallypost, and their cavalry to reconnoiter. Bugles sounded, horses neighed, and officers shouted to their men ordering them to lose no time in forming their lines at the earthwork. This was done in less time than I have taken to write it.

Then the old Captain says, "careful, boys, don't make any noise, arise and retreat in good order." We did not wait for the second order, but rose and made some long strides to the rear. Bang, whiz, went our neighbor Johnnie again, but he missed his aim, if aim he made in the darkness, and we strode onward in our retreat until we suddenly heard that unmistakeable click of the old army musket and the command, "Ready." Old Cap halted us, and we anticipated in a moment that a sallying party from the fort had succeeded in reaching our rear and had cut us off from our friends. Old Cap says, "wait, boys, I will advance alone and see whether they are friends or foes." He very soon ascertained that it was another Company of the Sixth Michigan, sent out to guard our rear and aid us in retreat. In the darkness they were unable to distinguish our uniform and came to a ready in case we proved to be a body of secesh. One nervous man in either company might have caused a sad catastrophe, for if one gun had been discharged volleys would have immediately followed. We soon learned our relations, joined issues, and proceeded in our retreat, thankful again that we had made so narrow an escape.

Poor boys, many of them fell mortally wounded or shot dead upon the same ground on the coming morrow.

We had fulfilled our mission, observations had been made, and we returned to camp under the protecting branches of the forest trees, there to rest as best we could in order to receive strength for the ordeal on the coming slaughter day, the memorable 27th of May, at Port Hudson. Nature could not withstand the demands for sleep, and soon, tired and weary, beyond endurance almost, we forgot our surroundings and dreamed of home and friends.

Before the dawn of day however, we were on the alert making ready for the terrible work before us. Company F was detailed to support a battery of light artillery, posted in a point of woods in easy range of the enemy's works. The time came for the general assault of the whole line. Our Company took its position with the Battery. The forlorn hope preceeded the charge, carrying bales, boxes and boards to scale the ditch. The cannons roared and belched forth sheets of flame. The musketry was incessant. Musket balls flew like hail, sweeping over the open field upon which we had made the reconnaissance the evening previous. The Sixth Michigan led the terrible charge and flew like the wind up to and over the ditch, clubbing muskets with the determined foe. They planted the stars and stripes upon the Rebel works and shouted victory. But, alas, where is the support that was to follow? They are Massachusetts men and have failed to stand the terrible ordeal and have retreated. The Confederates see their situation and in quick time mass all their available forces to drive back the Sixth Michigan from their works. Men are seen hurrying from all points to the disputed point in the field on the Rebel side, but where are the men to back the Michigan boys in their perilous situation? Alas, none come to the rescue and our men are compelled by an overwhelming force either to surrender or to fall back. Michigan men never surrendered during the late war unless there was no other alternative.

One long look in front and rear, and our boys commence the backward move. Out over the earthwork carrying their

flag with them, across the ditch, under the most murderous fire ever opened on Federal soldiers; back over the open field with an enfilading fire mowing them down by the score, yet they came covered with glory. No other troops had gained a redoubt on our battle front. No other troops had ever reached the ditch that surrounded the fort. From all along the right and left came the news of defeat. We were in the center of the attacking forces. A fearful loss had been sustained on our side all along the entire line, and not a single point gained. Our regiment was a sad lot of men indeed; fully one-third of the regiment was killed and wounded. I said the regiment came back covered with glory, but at what a fearful cost. During the engagement I saw our Division Commander, who had been foremost in the fight, carried to the rear and placed in an ambulance, with one leg shattered and useless. Gen. T. W. Sherman, while riding his horse in the front cheering his men on to the charge had his horse shot from under him, and the shell also carried his leg with it. I heard him say as the boys carried him off, "My, God, what will my men do now!"

The men of the Sixth Michigan however flinched not but dashed quickly forward with the result above. The day was lost. The shadows began to lengthen, when our officers sent a flag of truce asking permission to care for our dead and wounded upon the open field, being completely exposed to a burning tropical sun. It was granted; then commenced the saddest part of the day. One by one we carried our comrades to the rear, the wounded first, placing them in the ambulances which carried them still farther to the rear, where hospitals were established in deserted plantation buildings; some to live, some to die, and some to suffer amputation of one leg, one arm, or perhaps both. I saw one of our boys that still remained with us carrying his once powerful right arm in a sling and found that a Rebel bullet had shattered it at the elbow. He too, like many others had to suffer the pain of amputation near the shoulder.

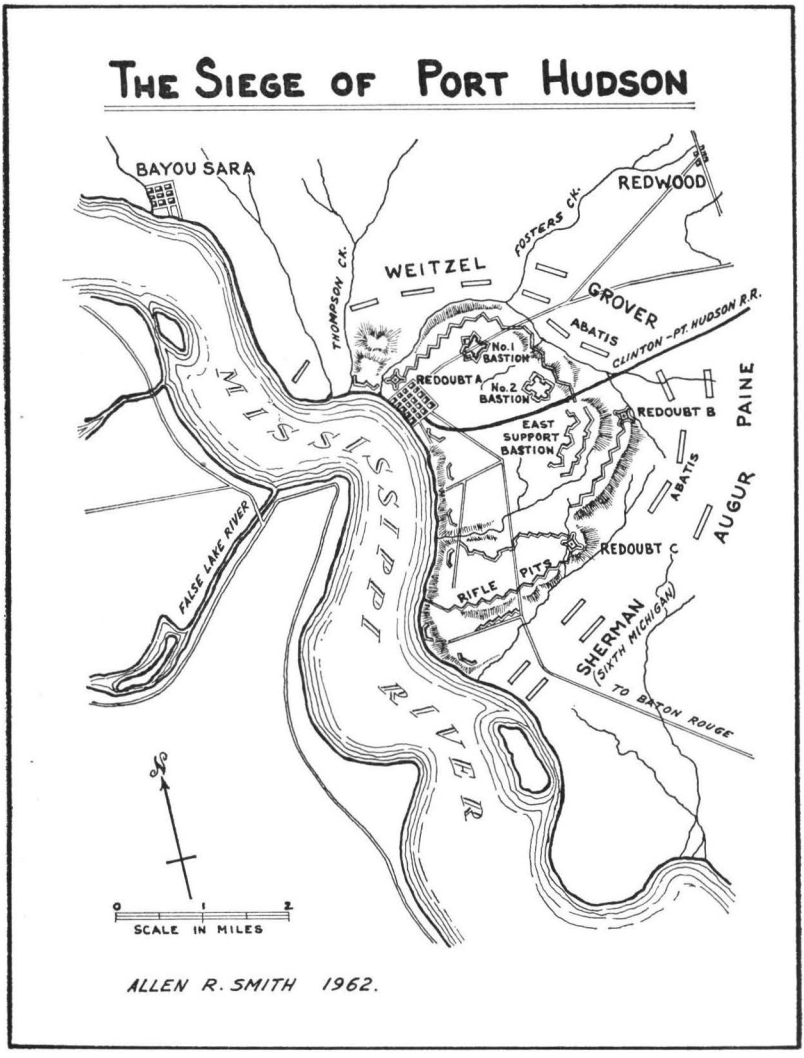
After the wounded were brought off, many of whom

had suffered everything but death on that terrible field, began the work of carrying off our dead. As they came on the stretchers anxious comrades gathered around to see who had fallen. One sad scene especially occurs to me; a comrade was laid among the dead under the trees, and I saw Major Clark of our regiment bend over the form, and then covering his face with his hands he burst forth in a flood of tears, and sobbed and cried as though his heart would break. It was his own nephew, Lieutenant Clark, of Company D.[30] I also stooped to see how he had fallen or why, and found that a Rebel bullet had entered one ear and going directly through his head had passed out at the other. Poor boy, he never knew that he was wounded. Death must have been instantaneous.

The faces of the dead had blackened in the burning sun and were as dark as that of the full blood African slave. They were past recognition by the countenance. It was a sad, sad scene that summer evening. I turned again and saw a group standing over the form of a dead comrade, and approaching learned that this was Col. Cowles, of a New York regiment. On his breast he wore a plate of mail, which was bullet proof, but in turning to cheer on his men (for he was among the bravest) he had exposed an unprotected portion of his body, and a Minie ball had laid him dead upon the field. I could tell of many such scenes, but time and space will not permit, and I must hurry on to some other topic concerning the siege of Port Hudson. It was determined to lay siege now and see if we could not starve out the Johnnies. We found them strongly fortified and determined to hold the fort, trusting for some forces to come in our rear and compel us to raise the siege. Many rumors did come to us of heavy forces of Confederate troops coming to the rescue of the besieged, but they failed to put in their appearance, and things remained at nearly a stand still.

30. This was Major Charles E. Clark, of Dowagiac. His nephew was Lieut. Fred J. Clark, also of Dowagiac.

Our regiment was removed to the extreme left, resting on the river bluff where we were detailed as sharpshooters. The twenty-first Indiana Heavy Artillery was also stationed here with twenty and thirty pound Parrot guns, and the two regiments mingled together and became as brothers of one family.



CHAPTER XVI

I have said we were with the Twenty-first Indiana Heavy Artillery, The Fourth Wisconsin Infantry was also on the left, and these three western regiments were the only western men in the Nineteenth Army Corps, Department of the Gulf. In passing around to the left of the line I saw men stationed in tree tops with signal flags, and learned that this line of signals extended from the river above the fort to the river below, and they could talk the entire distance, perhaps five miles, with those flags. In one place we came out in full view of the Rebel works, and they opened fire upon us with field artillery. None of our men were touched, but a poor mule was less fortunate—one of the leaders on our baggage wagon. A shell came along and took one of its fore feet and it went hobbling along on three feet. The colored driver seeing what was done dismounted instantly and fled. Some of the boys, however, managed to get the team along to the woods nearby, where the unfortunate mule was dispatched and another one put in its place.

We arrived without further incident at the place for our new camping ground in a strip of woods perhaps a mile to the rear of the Rebel works. Here we made ourselves as comfortable as possible, doing picket duty and sharpshooting. The mortar boats on the river were continually firing shells into the fort, and these shells must pass directly over our camp. Often times premature discharges or explosions of shells made it hot for us. Poor fuses would often cause shells to explode shortly after leaving the mortar. We could always tell when a shell exploded prematurely, and we could soon hear that unmistakeable whirr of the pieces as they swiftly approached us. Then the boys would hide behind trees on the Rebel side until the pieces passed or struck near by. I remember one day we heard those pieces coming as usual with that awful whirr through the air; one of the boys was lying on the ground with his haversack

under his head, and he with the rest jumped for the shelter of the trees, leaving his haversack on the ground where he lay. After the pieces had struck, my comrade went back to where he was lying, and found his haversack had been driven into the ground with a piece of shell. Fortunate for him indeed that he took his head from its resting place. Had he remained where he was his head would have been torn asunder and buried where it lay. Thus thousands of times did soldiers escape death only by a hair's breadth, as it were; many times did we slip behind the trees to escape from the missiles sent by our own guns. We were actually more afraid of them then of the Confederate guns.

Once more Company F was called upon for a reconnaissance, I presume on account of our old and experienced Captain, John Corden, who had served in the Crimean war; was at the siege of Sebastopol, and was counted one of the most competent officers in the Sixth Michigan. The General wanted to find out the position and strength of the artillery on this side of the fort. So one stormy night while the darkness was so complete as to be almost felt we sallied out toward the fort. The rain poured in torrents, but we slowly felt our way along, and found ourselves upon the verge of a deep ravine. In this ravine we knew there were obstructions of some kind to hinder the Yankees from assaulting the fortifications. We soon found out the nature of those obstructions. Plunging down the bank, in no time we were completely snared in the intricate marshes of fallen timber and briar bushes. I found myself completely fastened in the briars. By some noise we had made, it was soon evident that the Rebels had been alarmed. We could hear them moving their guns, and presently boom went a gun and whiz came a shell that threw the dirt in our faces. They knew very near where we lay, for the first shell was soon followed by several more, and we got up and "dusted." It was pretty uncomfortable for a few seconds, and we did not lose much time in climbing out of that briar patch. Again we marched back to camp, satisfied that it would be terrible to pass through those ravines in an assault, even

though it were daylight. We returned to camp and found the boys all turned out under arms. Wet and weary we sought our tents and soon forgot all our troubles.

Soon after this the officer of the guard conceived a plan of relieving the Confederate picket posts one dark night. By some means they came in possession of the Johnnies' countersign. About midnight our boys started out to put in practice the theory. It worked like a charm, and several picket posts were relieved, the Johnnies made prisoners, and our men posted in their places. When the Rebel guard came to relieve, they found they were in possession of the wrong countersign, and taking in the situation of things posted their picket line only a few rods from our own. At one place a pile of rails only separated our pickets from theirs. They could reach each other with their bayonets, and chatted to pass away the hours while on duty. This trick was only played once, however, for they looked out for Yankee tricks after that on that score, although we did play many other tricks upon the poor Johnnies.

Well, we got tired of those mortar shells bursting over us and the Indiana boys thought to put a stop to this nuisance. There was a rifle gun in the citadel in our immediate front on the bluff that commanded the river, and held the fleet a mile and a half down the river. This gun was a powerful one and threw solid steel pointed shot that pierced the strongest iron-clads in the fleet. One afternoon we decided to cripple this gun if possible. The Sixth Michigan were all out as sharpshooters, and also as many of the Indiana boys as could be spared. We took two thirty-pound Parrots and moved them down near the river where we were in plain sight of the citadel, and could get a good aim at said gun if the Johnnies ran it in battery. Our men were all on the alert.

No sooner did the Indiana boys show up than the Rebs ran their gun into the embrazure, but failed to succeed in firing it, for our boys made it so hot for their gunners that they could not fire the gun even once. Our men fired two shots, and yet the gun remained unhit. "Once more, boys,

three times and out." Hurrah, the Rebel gun is dismounted! Didn't we have a jubilee then? We hurrahed and shouted. The fleet immediately moved up the river about one-half the distance, and we escaped those terrible mortar shells after that. After the surrender of the fort I saw this gun, and it was split about eighteen inches up from the muzzle. One trunnion was broken off, and it was a complete wreck. This was a grand move for the fleet as well as for us.

We gradually crowded their picket line back until only a single ravine lay between us. Occasionally a deserter straggled out and we learned somewhat of the situation inside. We were told that Gen. Gardner[31] was determined to withstand the siege at all hazards, but that provisions were getting scarce, and they must soon receive succor from Confederate forces outside, or surrender.

It was again decided to storm the works of Port Hudson. The day and hour are fixed. Our heavy siege guns pour an unceasing fire into the resolute enemy's camp all through the night. At dawn of day on the morning of the 13th or 14th of June a general assault was to be made with the entire line from right to left. Now I am not supposed to know anything about the condition of commanding officers, but of one thing I am certain, that there was "a nigger in the fence" somewhere, and entire confusion on our part of the line. Orders had been issued from our Division Commander giving to the Sixth some very important movements on this occasion. One was for a certain captain to take fifty picked men, tried and true, to perform the feat of entering the Rebel works, proceed to Gen. Gardner's headquarters, and make him prisoner. Then to hold the position at all hazards until certain reinforcements could join them. But what an idea! Another was for Captain Corden, of Company F, to take two hundred men, proceed to the

31. General William M. Gardner, Georgia, was a West Pointer, class of 1846. He served with distinction in the Mexican War, and at 1861 resigned his commission to accept a Brig. General's commission in the C. S. A.

river bank, and storm the citadel, a strong position on the bluff commanding the river. To reach that position the men must climb an almost perpendicular bank, perhaps a hundred feet high or more, proceeding singly in niches cut in the clay bank. This was another very fine maneuver for us Michigan boys to accomplish, in full view of the enemy; exposed to fire of light and heavy artillery, and in easy range of common shotguns.

Well, orders must be obeyed, and Captain Corden took his men and proceeded to the bluff and commenced making the perilous ascent. Your writer was among this forlorn hope, and remembers well the way the ball opened. First came a single Minie singing just over our heads as we came to view. Then several came in quick succession and made it lively for us on the hillside. We saw them move cannons into the embrazures ready to mow us down like the grass of the field as soon as we came far enough up for them to depress their aim upon us. About this time there came out loud and clear upon the morning air, "Alt!" and the "Henglish" of Captain Corden was up. He said, "boys, screen yourselves as best you can, we will go no farther in this perilous fool's errand." We dropped close to the earth and awaited the outcome. While we lay thus for a short time a single Minie came from some unseen marksman hidden from our vision, and passed through the thigh of A. G. Amsden, Orderly Sergeant of Company F. Comrade Amsden scarcely made a murmur, but such antics as were cut by a fellow comrade near by who received the spent ball after it had passed through the comrade's thigh. It struck him on the fleshy part of the hip, and made him dance lively. At first we did not know comrade Amsden was wounded; supposed the ball had entered the other comrade's body. We were soon aware of the fact, however, for Amsden says, "boys, I'm wounded," and we aided him to the rear and out of range.

Then we received orders to go and sharpshoot in the front of our position farther to the right, and we were screened from the right somewhat by timber and hollows

in the earth. Captain Corden says: "Boys, every man for himself now, do your duty." And right glad were we to escape from this perilous task of climbing the heights to scale the citadel. We kept up this sharpshooting all day long. Our forces had again met with a terrible loss and were driven back at every point along the defences. Still we kept up the fire as individual skirmishers. Thus ended the second assault on Port Hudson. It was an ignominious defeat.

Between our position and the Rebel works were deep ravines full of fallen timber and rank growing briar bushes, and I sometimes wonder how a rabbit could get through the marshes. Only a single wagon road led across to the rebel earth works, and this road was commanded by a score or more of cannons, loaded with grape and canister and shrapnel shell. A few resolute men could hold the enemy's position against all the forces that could march against it. Our men might have rushed on until their dead bodies formed a barrier to all farther progress, yet they could not have reached the fort. While a solid column of infantry was marching down this road a shrapnel shell exploded in their front rank and slew sixteen of their number, besides wounding others. It was a pass of death, and the iron hand of fate defied the Yankees, and they were compelled to retreat. Oh, the sights I saw that day; men wounded in every conceivable form from sole of foot to crown of head. One poor fellow I assisted to the rear had his lower jaw and all of his teeth taken away by a musket ball. Another wounded through the groin, another through the leg, and so many maimed and crippled for life, while scores of our comrades lay dead along the hillside of that terrible ravine.

Our commanders now decided to go into regular siege, erect earthworks, mount heavy siege guns, and prepare to stay until the game was bagged. We were only separated now by one deep gorge or ravine, and in my next chapter I will give you the experiences of the Sixth Michigan until the surrender of the Rebel Commander, Gen. Gardner.

CHAPTER XVII

We now commenced work at night throwing up earthworks, digging rifle pits, etc. Our regiment was detailed as sharpshooters and were kept constantly in the pits. We soon had quite a strong position fortified on the hill, having erected a heavy earthwork and mounted seventeen siege guns. Some of these were ten-inch Columbiad that had been taken from the ill-fated *Mississippi,* which was fired by the Confederates and burned in the river just below Port Hudson.

Almost every day some little event transpired to break up the monotony of our rifle pit home. We saw comrades killed and wounded often, for at times we were rebellious and would get in real earnest sharpshooting. I saw a comrade wounded to the death one day as he had stooped over in the bottom of our deep rifle pit rolling up his blanket to strap it on top of his knapsack. A musketball struck a limb of a tree that stood on the verge of the pit, and glancing downward, pierced our comrade's shoulder and penetrated to the lungs, where it lodged, throwing him into spasms, and oh, such terrible pain as he suffered. He would draw himself up until it seemed his knees would almost crush his head, then straighten out, moaning in terrible anguish. Four long hours he lived and suffered untold anguish, and then yielded up his life for his country. Again, another comrade going to a neighboring spring of water for a cooling draught received a Minie ball in his head, which killed him instantly. Many such events could I relate, but time and space warns me I must hasten lest I be too long with my story. How vividly those scenes return to me tonight as I write them for publication.

I must now incident on the action of the Sixth Michigan alone for a time. We had only a few feet of earth between "we'uns" and "they'uns." Gen. Dwight, our division com-

mander,[32] conceived the idea one day that the Sixth Michigan could take Port Hudson alone. They had several times proved their metal during the siege or attempted capture of the Rebel stronghold. Gen. Dwight therefore issued an order for the Sixth to charge from their rifle pits into the citadel of the enemy, and having possessed it to hold it against the Confederates. One afternoon the General came into our rifle pits and ordered the boys to charge. Our men were always ready to obey commands and quite a squad of them rushed out into the Rebel works. In the meantime our valiant General became stupidly unconscious from the effects of "commissary" administered to keep up his courage while he lay closely hugging the most secure part of our works. Our men were told that only a small posse of soldiers guarded and held this strong citadel, which commanded both land and water. That once inside they could easily hold the fort. But alas, it was a sad mistake. No sooner were our men over in the Rebel works than they saw their mistake. Scores rose up to meet them and dispute their farther progress, and scores more came rushing in from other points. It was a hot fight for a few moments, and bullets flew like hailstones. Wounded and bleeding our men were driven out by the overwhelming odds dashed against them. Several were made prisoners, while others made good their escape back into our own works. One of my esteemed comrades was severely wounded and made prisoner. After the surrender of the garrison we visited their hospital and found our comrade in a dying condition. His wounds had not received proper care, gangrene had set in, and the poor boy was just able to send a dying message to his loved friends, and the brave spirit fled to the home beyond the river.

One of my comrades did an heroic act worthy of note. Seeing a Rebel captain near him he charged bayonet on him and compelled him to climb over the earthwork in advance of him, and made him prisoner amid the cheers

32. This was William Dwight, of Massachusetts, a West Pointer, class of 1849, Brig. Gen. Vols., Nov. 29, 1862.

and hurrahs of the boys in the rifle pits on our side. I'll never forget the look of that scared officer as Charlie Dustin urged him into our works.[33] And Charlie said the Rebs were thicker over there than hair on a dog. They came pouring in like a swarm of bees from all quarters with fire in their eyes and muskets in their hands and our boys had to "git." Again the Sixth was repulsed and several men are lost, with no good accomplished.

The next measure was to mine the citadel and blow it off the bank into the river below. Our men commenced their hole in the ground, and like the Michigan gopher were soon lost to sight underneath the hill. This work was done principally in the night time in order to dispose of the fresh dirt and not draw the attention of the Confederates. We were furnished hand grenades with percussion caps to heave over into the Johnnies' pit. And many of them did we throw over there to attract their attention. That was about all they were good for, as we soon after learned. We threw one over one day and heard no explosion. Presently the Johnnies returned the compliment and threw it back into our pit. It exploded and a piece struck one of our men on the fleshy part of the thigh, and we expected to see him lay down and die. But imagine our surprise to see him seize his mining tools and he into his hole in the ground as pert as ever; perhaps rubbing his back with his hand to see if it was all there yet. We did not throw any more of these child's play bombs into the Rebel works.

In the Rebel works at one embrazure we could see the muzzle of a brass gun, and our boys, being Yankees and therefore inquisitive, determined to ascertain why this gun was left in the embrazure. One night some of our men crept up out of our works and up to the muzzle of the gun. They found it was stationary, having been rendered immovable by some means, and also found it was loaded to the muzzle ready to greet our men if they attempted to

33. This was Private Charles Dustin, Dundee. See Robertson, p. 265 for the incident.

charge the works in its immediate front. Now said our boys, "let's see if we can't capture that gun right under the Johnnies' noses." A large rope was procured and one of our daring men climbed up to the gun and slipped a noose on the muzzle. Then a score or more of comrades down in our works tugged with might and main to pull the thing out. It proved to be too strongly fastened and we could not budge it an inch. In the morning friend and foe, Yankee and Johnnie Reb, both gazed upon that gun with the rope still fastened to the muzzle, and wondered how it came there. The Michigan boys knew and laughed in their sleeves.

Again one day a daring young soldier from our land mortar battery said he was desirous to know what Johnnie was doing over in his hole. There was no firing on either side. It was about mid-day. He crept slyly up over the bank and reached the top of the Rebel works unseen by the Rebs. He stood for a single moment with an army revolver in hand and gazed into the Rebel works, then raising his arm he fired one or two shots quickly into the Johnnies' works and slid down out of their works. We were watching him, and well was it for him we were. Bullets sung like bees. We kept them down so they could not see him and he crawled safely back into our own rifle pits. He said some were playing cards, some asleep, some doing one thing and some another; doing perhaps as we were doing, trying to pass the time away as best we could. Almost every day some such incident occurred to keep up our spirits and rouse our ambition.

CHAPTER XVIII

The first of July has dawned upon us and we had reached the rear of Port Hudson on the 26th of May. Quite a long siege yet; the Rebs are obstinate and will not surrender. We have our heavy battery of seventeen siege guns all in readiness and we conclude to celebrate the 4th of July in real earnest. In the afternoon we called over to Johnnie and told him to look out as we were going to fire a salute. Down into their holes they got, and we into ours. Then those seventeen heavy guns were all fired at once into the Rebel earthworks. We saw human bodies hurled into the air, rails flew like so many broom splints in the evening wind. Then presently a boom came back to us, and we had to look a little out else we might have been done for also. The firing continued only a short time, and our Fourth was over. Time passed, and soon the morning dawned that brought to us glad tidings.

Allow me to fall back and give one little incident which I have omitted in my routine of story. The Sixth Michigan had been many days in the rifle pits, constantly day and night. Extremely exposed to the burning sun by day and the damp chill by night, we were weary and fatigued. Our officers begged of the commanding general to relieve us for a time so that we might obtain much needed rest. The request was granted. An eastern regiment relieved us, and we fell back to the rear, thinking to rest up for a few days, after so many days of unceasing fatigue. For one night we remained outside, and a part of the succeeding day. Toward evening, however, an order came for us to resume our old position, as the enemy kept our men closely inside our works and would not allow the darkies to work on our earthworks. I will not dwell on the incident very long. We went back into the rifle pits and commenced work in earnest at sharpshooting. We felt a little inclined to be mad at our Rebel friends for acting so meanly as to draw us back so soon into the pits.

We had not been in the works more than twenty minutes ere we heard a hello, and we said hello, and a Johnnie said "is that d—d Sixth Michigan in the rifle pits again," and we said "you bet," and we gave them our best compliments in the way of musket balls. Only a short time elapsed and we heard the "hello" again. "I say Yank, let's quit for awhile," and we said "all right," and up we got on the top of our works, and they on theirs, and commenced our old mode of social converse. The darkies resumed their work on the earthworks and were unmolested in the broad open daylight. They also made needed repairs. Pardon me for this retrograde in my reminiscences; I have done it to show how much more effective were the sturdy men of Michigan than the city regiments from the eastern states.

It is the morning of the 8th of July, 1863, a force of Federal cavalry have passed through the country from Vicksburg, Miss., and joined us at Port Hudson. They bring us the glad tidings that Vicksburg had surrendered on the 4th of July, and that Grant's forces were about to march to our assistance. At once an escort is dispatched with a flag of truce to confer with the Confederate General demanding his immediate surrender, informing him also of the surrender of Vicksburg on the 4th. It produced the desired effect, and at once negotiations were commenced for the surrender of Port Hudson, and toward evening the Federal forces with banners flying and bands playing, we marched in through the sally ports and took possession. The Confederates stacked their arms and marched at our command.

We had completed our mine under the powerful citadel of the enemy and intended to spring it that evening had they not surrendered. After the surrender some of the Confederates came over into our rifle pits, and seeing the opening under their works enquired the meaning, and we frankly told them that we intended to have launched them and their citadel into the river one hundred feet below, that same evening. Seeing the rope fastened around the cannon's mouth they enquired who was the daring man that essayed

to do so dangerous a deed. They said the one who did it ought to receive a high promotion. Well, truly there were many of the Sixth Michigan boys that deserved promotion nobly earned, but never obtained. All could not be officers, privates were necessary; indispensible then, but now of little account.

Happy indeed were our men to find themselves masters of the situation and prisoners of the coveted stronghold. The prisoners were taken to New Orleans, and we occupied the strong position on the great river which was now open to navigation to our forces from its source to the Gulf of Mexico.

Not long after this came the nip and tuck. Our services were desired for a longer period and we were asked to re-enlist for three years more, or during the war. We had been in the service some two and a half years. Away in the far south a thousand miles or more from our own happy homes, and now we were asked to volunteer to remain yet another three years the servants of the Nation.[34] Severally we considered the matter, and scores of us concluded to give our time, (for we considered the remuneration simply nominal) to the Nation. We were promised a thirty-days' furlough in our own homes; given a bonus of some few dollars as bounty. Your humble servant was promised the clerkship of Company F, and snapped the bait, and had the shackles fastened upon him for another term of years. Soon we bade our comrades that had not the necessary courage to re-enlist a farewell, and with our officers, which we now considered our equals, we went on board an upbound steamer bound for Cairo, Ill.

We purchased our first-class cabin passage tickets and stood upon equal footing with our shoulder-strap friends. In the early part of the voyage the officers assumed to be

34. The 6th was stationed at Port Hudson until March 11, 1864. Here 274 men, enough to preserve the organization, were re-enlisted. Furloughs were given, and the men left for Kalamazoo under command of Col. Edward Bacon.

entitled to seats at first table every time. The boys couldn't see it, and argued that first at table first served. The officers then had the table waiters reserve them seats by turning up chairs. But this was of no avail. The boys could very easily turn down a common chair and possess it, and it come to be conceded by all that first come first served.

We joked one officer and said "not now can military discipline govern us; wait until our visit home is over, than we will pass under your entire control and obey humane orders." We passed on up the river with scarcely anything of note transpiring until we reached Cairo. There we halted some few hours and then went on the cars that were to convey us to Chicago. What kind of cars? Oh, they were fashionable box coaches, and we stood up like so many ninepins; not room to lie down if we desired. Your writer, with some two or three other comrades took a sleeping car attached on top of a box palace car. We spread our blankets crosswise of the car and laid down and slept, as we journeyed on through the night. On the morrow we were the happy possessors of boiled eggs at 4 cents per dozen. Often had we paid a half dollar for two eggs and a small slice of bacon down in the far south. Soon we reached old Kalamazoo and struck out for our several homes.

CHAPTER XIX

At home! How well do we remember those few days when we were at home on veteran furlough. We enjoyed them hugely, although we did meet now and then a northern Rebel, commonly called copperhead. I recall one or two in particular. One had a very agreeable step-daughter; she being an old schoolmate and intimate acquaintance prior to the war, it was quite natural for your humble servant to call upon her. I did so once or twice, but said "step-daddy" raised a great breeze and said if I came again he would shoot me. Well, I didn't scare "worth a continental." When I was about leaving for the far south the second time, I called again and bade the young lady good bye; nor did I have occasion to resort to my Colt's navy that rested in its case at my side.

Again, one day as I drove my horse and buggy into the streets of our village, when in front of the postoffice building, several men were earnestly talking, and one man said in stentorious tones, "All the northern soldiers went down south for was to rob henroosts, plunder honest citizens' houses and ruin the virtuous women of the persecuted southern Confederacy." In a twinkling I landed on the walk and demanded retraction of such sentiment, else I should proceed to punish such rebellious principles. "Well," said he, "I do not know as you went for that purpose; perhaps not; but the majority did." "Now," said I, "Mr. B., were it not for your gray hairs and advanced years I should not hesitate to publicly reprimand you for this insolence and traitorous abuse of myself and fellow comrades. I will not lay hands upon you, feeling that I should in after years regret having struck an old man, even though one of my most treacherous enemies, and farther, I care not to pollute my person with such contemptible matter as is concentrated in your make-up; but I warn you to have a care how you express such sentiment in the presence of veterans at home

on furlough, for some will not stop to consider a single moment, but will sorely punish you for your meanness."

We still have those same slinking, cowardly home secesh among us, and it is from them that we hear the continual croaking with regard to the old soldiers, "government paupers, government leeches, government swindlers, government frauds," and similar epithets. But I must not dwell here. We remained some few days over our alloted time on an extension and enjoyed greatly our visit home.

Again the iron horse speeds us toward Dixie. We start from Kalamazoo and proceed to Chicago. Then we take the Illinois Central for Cairo. At Centralia, I think, a detachment of Illinois troops were put on our train in front of our regiment and next to the engine. It was Sunday evening and we were being transported swiftly toward the south. The shades of night had fallen over the earth and still we slackened not. We were enjoying ourselves, relating incidents occurring while we were home. Your humble servant was passing the time in playing war tunes upon his violin. Suddenly we were precipitated over the backs of the car seats, and general confusion ensued. The iron horse snorted loudly for a pull on the reins, and our first thought was, a collision. Out of the windows and doors our boys swarmed like bees. Soon we saw lanterns flitting around the forward part of the train and we feared something had happened up there of serious moment. We ran up along the track and found several coaches lying in the ditch, terribly smashed up. Men were busy extricating the dead and wounded from the wreck. Some had to be chopped out with axes. It was a fearful spectacle. Several of our Illinois comrades had been furloughed to the other and better land; others were crippled for life. The Sixth Michigan boys had escaped. Our baggage car was somewhat demoralized. None of our coaches were derailed or broken. We remained until the bodies were all extricated, then several of my comrades and myself went forward about a mile and a half to a small village and stopped there for night. We were told it would take all night to clear the track so our train could proceed.

The accident was caused by the breaking of an axle under the tender of the engine.

In the morning as the train came into the station at the village it scarcely slackened its speed as it passed through, and my comrades thought we were left sure. I said let them go, there will be another train soon. One of the boys, fearful of being left, made a rush for the train, laid hold of the guard at the steps and was swung clear from the ground. He failed to secure a footing on the steps however, and soon fell to the ground, his foot across the iron rail. The car wheels passed over his ankle and almost entirely severed the foot. The poor boy received another furlough and was sent homeward again as soon as his injuries permitted his journey. Oh I tell you, reader, the shot and shell and Minie balls of the armed Rebellion were not the only dangers incident to the late volunteer soldier. Wrecked railroad trains, collisions of steamers, sinking vessels, careless comrades, and other means served to devastate our noble band of patriotic boys in the far south.

To-day your humble servant as he writes feels the results of those four long years devoted to the cause of freedom. Twitching pains in the temple, neuralgia, rheumatism, impaired vision, stiffened limbs, premature old age—all the undesirable results of army life in Louisiana swamps.[35] But I forget, I am writing a sketch of the Sixth Michigan and not of my own personal troubles. We pass on down to Port Hudson, La., without further incident of note and again find ourselves in the old Rebel stronghold. Once more we must give our whole attention to army drill. We have been promoted from the infantry service to that of heavy artillery.[36] Day by day the comrades drill with light and heavy

35. When he applied for a pension in 1881 Johnson listed neuralgia contracted at Port Hudson as his chief disability. Neuralgia and heart disease were given as the causes of his death, May 18, 1888.

36. The regiment arrived at Port Hudson with some new recruits on May 11, 1864. On July 10, 1863 the regiment was converted by order

guns, and soon attain efficiency in that drill, as well as in the infantry tactics. So far as I was concerned I did not attain much efficiency in the artillery drill as I had been appointed Company Clerk, and did no other duty save that. I might mention much that occurred during our stay in the old fort that cost us so much to occupy, but space forbids. While we were home on veteran furlough the part of the regiment that had not re-enlisted went with the Banks expedition up the Red River. I cannot relate their adventures. From what I heard I presume the boys did not enjoy their pleasure trip in that region.

Before leaving Port Hudson, I went to note something of a little skirmish that we had with the Johnnies up at Tunica Bend, some two hundred miles up the river from our camp.[37] Our equine friends, the fellows that hauled our heavy luggage, were in need of rations, and we could not draw on our commissary at that time. We had learned that up at Tunica there was an old secesh planter that had several train loads of corn in cribs. Those in command decided to raid the plantation and confiscate enough of said corn to feed our long-eared friends. Accordingly six volunteers from each company were called for to go on the foraging expedition. Somehow I was always in for any such adventure, and some times wished I had kept my hand out of the mess. This time I was again among the sixty volunteers. A staunch river steamer awaited us at the landing. Six mule teams were put on board with as many old heavy army wagons. We went on board under command of Col. Edward Bacon, (now residing at Niles, Mich.), and soon steamed up the river, escorted by a river gunboat.

In due time we reached the Tunica landing, disembarked our teams and, carefully looking to our arms, proceeded

of Gen. Nathan P. Banks to a regiment of heavy artillery, but was to retain its infantry number while receiving the pay, organization, and equipment of heavy artillery.

37. This expedition to Tunica Bend took place on November 3, 1863.

along the road up the river to where the old planter lived. The boys said as they came in sight of the house, that they saw a man hastily mount a horse and ride hurriedly away, but thought at the time that it was perhaps some Johnnie who had called there and seeing the Yanks approaching had decided to retire. Afterwards we could easily read the action of this horseman and his purpose.

We found the old planter at home. He protested in regard to our taking his corn. We said that the government would pay for the corn if he was a loyal man and put our colored help and teams to work hauling corn to the landing. We were masters of the situation then; we put our pickets out, and stacking our arms close at hand, proceeded to give the colored ladies orders in regard to getting us something to eat. They cooked us corn dodgers in bake-kettles covered with live coals. We found butter in plenty and soon had a good square meal. We felt no uneasiness, as we had been told there was no Rebel force in reaching distance for one day. We ate, drank, and were merry. Progress was being rapidly made in hauling the corn to the river. Many large cribs were found filled with this needed grain. We saw but little of Mr. Planter, as he kept closely housed. Matters went on quietly and satisfactorily until about four o'clock in the afternoon. The wind changed and we were in for it. It seems to me that I can even now see the same scene as plainly as on that eventful afternoon in which we enacted a drama, the several parts of which are never to be forgotten.

CHAPTER XX

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon, as we were lounging on the grass a sound greeted our ears that roused us to quick action. Hark! what's that? It proved to be our pickets firing, and only time enough elapsed for us to secure our arms ere we saw a large force of cavalry come out into the road between us and the river. There were at least four hundred mounted men, well armed and equipped. They began marching on the corncribs. We took position behind the cribs and opened a lively fire upon their solid ranks as they came up the road. Several horsemen toppled in their saddles, and their bugle sounded a halt. Col. Bacon then took occasion to consider the situation. For a moment's time he stood and scanned the approaching host. Then turning to his men he said: "Boys, it's no use, there are more than five to one of us; we must make for the river, follow me." I shall never forget that moment of peril. Like the hunted deer of our Michigan forest Col. Bacon sped down the slope toward the ravine, clearing the fence at a bound, casting now and then a glance over his shoulder to see if the boys were making as good time as he. I must confess that with my "duck legs" I failed to compete with him at the outset. The enemy were in hot pursuit, we had detoured to the right and were describing an arc in order to reach the landing. Bullets flew like maddened hornets about our ears, yet we halted not, but ran for our lives and freedom. I soon found myself alone,—all had outran me,—and plunging into one of the numerous ravines, I sought a thick clump of briar-bushes, and being completely out of breath I fell and crawled into the intricate mesh and laid down in a hollow, secure from sight unless the enemy came directly through the thicket. I still retained my musket and ammunition, and I said to myself "whatever Johnnie comes upon my retreat shall take his ounce of Yankee lead."

I could distinctly hear the Rebel officers urging their men to ride into the under-brush and drive out the d—d

skulking Yankees. I would hear their men reply also and say, "we don't propose to ride to our death where we cannot see the danger, go in yourselves." The sun was about two and a half hours high when I ambushed, and I verily believe those were the longest hours I ever realized. Gradually my breath came back, and I could breathe natural again, but I dare not even raise my head from the hollow lest I might attract the attention of my near companions, the Confederates. At last, after an almost unendurable suspense the night shadows gradually crept over my hiding place. I heard the Confederates post their pickets between me and the river, and again I thought that my chances for escape were slim indeed. When I ran from the plantation I thought only of cracking corn and starving in Andersonville prison. We had read of the cruel treatment which had been meted out to our unfortunate comrades that had fallen into the Rebels' hands and I thought, surely I would rather risk death than share their fate.

Darkness now covered the land. Presently I heard a gun in the direction of the river, and a shell came shrieking over me and landed near the planter's house. Presently many more came, and I took in the meaning at once. Our gunboat men were trying to drive the Johnnies back so that our stragglers, hid in the wooded ravines, could come in. I heard their bugle sound loud and clear on the still night air, the call for retreat. I knew that some of their forces did retreat, but was rather inclined to believe that picket posts were still maintained between me and the river. The firing from the gunboat ceased, and I cautiously crept out of my hollow and peered around. I could see no living being. At once I stealthily began my advance down the ravine toward the much desired objective point—the river landing. I had proceeded perhaps some ten or a dozen rods when I espied a friend or foe sitting under the branches of an over-hanging tree. Making my gun ready I approached still closer, and discovered one of my own comrades. I tell you, reader, it was a happy meeting. He also had retained his gun and ammunition. We felt almost equal then

to any common picket post we might encounter in our progress toward the landing and freedom. In whispers we congratulated each other, and decided to proceed immediately down the ravine.

We know that before we reached the river we must cross a wagon road, and we expected to find it strongly and vigilantly guarded. Nevertheless this was our only way of escape, and we must run the chances and abide the issue. Again we cautiously advanced still further down the ravine, and in a few moments I said "hist" to my comrade. I heard inaudible sentences just then, and peering up the side of the ravine I saw two men under a projection of tangled fallen timber. It was evident they had not seen or heard our approach. It took only a few moments' time to convince me that here were two more of my comrades, and accordingly I gave them a sign that they immediately understood. We united our forces and found that three of us had guns; the fourth comrade had been obliged to abandon his gun, being on foot and hotly pressed by pursuing horsemen. Well, we held a few minutes' consultation and decided to march at once on the road, which was only a few rods away. There were four of us, three well armed, and we said "there's no ghost of a chance for any common picket post we might run upon at the crossing of the wagon road." Soon we reached the open streak in the timber and knew we were at the critical point. Cautiously we pushed the undergrowth aside and peered up and down the road. Not a sound was heard. Neither friend nor foe came under our vision. Like so many native rabbits we bounded across the road and were safe on the winning side. We no longer feared any foe in our path. We could talk with open speech and recount our several adventures to each other.

We came out upon the river bank about a mile and a half above the landing, having made quite a lengthy detour in our march to the landing. We followed along down the river bank and some time near midnight arrived at the landing. We found our transport anchored out in mid-stream directly under cover of the gunboat. We halloed at the top

of our voices (and we felt like halloing about then) and received responsive halloo from the watch on deck. They inquired who was there, and we said "some of the Sixth Michigan men who got left; we want to come on board the transport." A yawl was immediately manned and pushed off to come after us. As they neared the landing they rested on their oars until we could give them proof of our identity. This being satisfactory they pulled along side and in a few moments we climbed from the yawl upon the deck of our own transport. I remember distinctly how rejoiced Col. Bacon was to see us come on board. "Boys," said he, "I had you all down among the missing; right gladly will I change my record." And right glad were we to again answer to our names as the roll was called. (Pardon, please, but should this sketch come to the notice of any one, or all, of those three comrades, will they write me a personal letter, as I want to hear from them truly.)

We found that several others were still absent, and were either killed or prisoners, three from my own Company, two of whom died in that accursed prison pen at Andersonville. Three more of the regiment remained some three days in the woods, and lived upon what dry corn in the ear they could secure at night time. After this length of time, the Rebs having left the plantation, they made their way to the landing, hailed a passing gunboat, and were brought on down to our camp at Port Hudson. They were sorry looking boys, I tell you.

We had also one comrade of our company very severely wounded, being shot through the hips sidewise, yet he escaped by the aid of our colonel and his comrades. His life was despaired of at first, yet he lived and came back from the war, at its close returning to his home in Battle Creek.

On the following morning one of our men belonging to a company of cavalry, which came with us, went out on horseback to scout and report the nearness of the Rebels to the landing. We soon heard shots exchanged and the horse came back riderless. Our men however, were successful in securing his dead body and brought it on board. Farther

than this we knew of no fatality. We found some two or three of our mule teams minus, and concluded we had corn enough if we could get what was piled on the landing. Our transport pulled up to the landing under close cover of the gunboat and we loaded on our corn and retreated down the river and landed at Port Hudson, quite satisfied to go into our old camp again instead of Andersonville.

CHAPTER XXI

We remained in Port Hudson for a while drilling in both heavy and light artillery tactics. From Port Hudson we proceeded to Morganzie, where we were stationed some little time doing infantry duty.[38] We did not remain here very long before we received orders to report at Vicksburg, Miss., to join the engineer corps. On arriving at Vicksburg we went into camp, some four miles in the rear of the city, at a point on the Jackson railroad called "four mile bridge." Some of our men were detailed to work in the railroad shops in the city. Some did provost duty, while the remainder were held in reserve at the bridge.

I must relate one or two incidents that occurred here in order to let the boys know that I was there. Boys, do you remember the night when one of Company F's men, in a fit, pitched off into the ravine in the immediate rear of our quarters? Didn't we have a time though getting him out from among the briars and rubbish in the darkness? Here also one of our lieutenants was found dead in his bunk one morning. The comrade who slept with him knew nothing of the time when death reached his icy hand inside of their tent and took the lieutenant from us. In the morning he tried to rouse him, but found life extinct. His bunk mate was cold and rigid in death. Thus our numbers grew less everywhere; shot and shell, accidents and disease brought death among us often.

I will now give you an estimate of our organization; from first to last we had some 1,700 men in our regiment, and we came home, if I remember rightly, but some 400 strong.[39] Many we left under the southern soil, with no

38. This was Morganza, La., where the 6th stayed June 6-24, 1864. The regiment remained at Vicksburg until July 23rd.

39. According to Robertson, p. 269, the total enrollment of the 6th was 1,957 officers and enlisted men. Its losses were 542 men, of these

tablets to mark their last resting places. Many were mustered out on account of wounds and disease. Some did not re-enlist, and were mustered out at the expiration of three years' service. Company F had 179 names on its final muster-out rolls.

Again at Camp four-mile bridge. Our men were bilious and complaining. Our noble-hearted surgeon[40] ever ready to aid the boys, when in his power so to do, soliloquized thus: "Now," says Charlie," I believe it would do the boys good to have some good lager beer." Accordingly he managed by some device to smuggle a barrel into camp, and told the boys to help themselves. They were not very long in making a vent and tapping said barrel. I remember how happy some of the boys got, and some one said, "there comes the colonel." Now, there was a brush-heap near our quarters, and one of my comrades, always full of life and fun, upon hearing it announced that the colonel was coming, made one big dive for the brush-heap and crawled under, saying, "boys, does my head show any?" Some one grabbed his heels and pulled him out from his hiding place, and we had a good laugh and no little fun at his expense. The colonel was close in his quarters, leaving the boys to their fun.

One more little incident and I will close this camp experience. Some little distance farther out from camp lived several wealthy planters. They had procured from our regiment a detachment to guard their plantations from any intrusion from the boys, who were always looking for something good to eat. We knew where there were large peach

2 officers and 43 enlisted men were killed in action, 21 died of wounds, 6 officers and 470 men died of disease. For slightly different figures see *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War* (Kalamazoo, 1905), vol. 6, p. 3. Frederick H. Dyer (comp.), *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines, 1907), p. 1284, places the total loss at 582 officers and men.

40. The surgeon was Charles V. Mottram, Kalamazoo; enlisted August 19, 1861, honorably discharged for disability Dec. 23, 1864.

trees laden with lucious peaches, also sweet potato patches, where there were wagon loads of nice potatoes, and we didn't have either in camp, although we did relish such things greatly. Therefore, one evening after taps a squad of us including the orderly sergeant of Company F and myself and some half dozen more comrades decided to make a raid, notwithstanding the places were strongly guarded, and see if we could not draw some extra rations.

We were on the look out for the guard as we approached the plantation. It was dark enough for our purpose, and just as we were about to enter the grounds an old hound bayed out loud and shrill. Quicker than a flash we were flat in the tall grass and weeds, for we knew it was the signal to put the guard and planter on the alert. Sure enough out they came, the old planter saying, "shoot 'em, shoot 'em, the d—d thieving Yankees," and our comrade guards shot their muskets off at an elevation of 45 degrees, and the old secesh shouted: "take them, Touser, lick 'em," and we laid low down, some of the guards almost stepping on our heels, but of course they did not see anybody, and we had our hands on our Navy's ready for the dog if he attacked us. They passed on, however, and we up and still a little farther on, and then we crept into the same grounds and did not retreat until we had all we could carry in our blouses and hats, or caps.

When we returned to camp we found business awaiting us. Orders had been left at company headquarters for every man that was missing at the midnight roll call to report to the colonel's tent next morning. We began to feel kind of serious after all over our adventure. The firing of the guards at the plantation had aroused the sentinels at camp, and the long roll had been beat, and the whole regiment turned out at midnight under arms, expecting an immediate attack from the enemy. Calling the roll to see if all the men were in their places had of course squealed on us poor foragers, and we must now suffer the penalty. We must atone to our offended military discipline. It was rather mean to deprive the boys of their rest and

give them such a big scare at midnight, but we did not mean to; it was not our fault—that miserable hound did it all. If he had remained quiet we should have not disturbed anybody, either at the plantation or at the camp.

Well, morning came, and headed by our orderly sergeant we marched over to Col. Bacon's headquarters, expecting ere long to be on our way to the city to report for fatigue duty under the provost guard. With long faces and penitent looks we stood before the office of tribunal. The Colonel came out and thus addressed us: "Where were you men at roll call last night at midnight?" "Out foraging, sir, after sweet potatoes." "Didn't you know 'twas strictly against the orders of our commanding general?" "Yes, sir." "You were also the cause of a good deal of alarm in camp. The penalty for such offence is to report to the city to the provost marshal to attend to duties assigned by him. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves to commit such mean acts in the night time when you ought to be quietly resting in your tents." Well, we began to see leniency showing up on the part of the colonel, and a streak of mirth stole across our gloomy visages in spite of ourselves, and the colonel proceeded. "Why do you go prowling around at midnight like a pack of thieves, causing alarm and bringing reproach upon the regiment? If you want any potatoes or peaches, or like matter, go out like men in open day and ask for them. If denied, why take them in broad daylight, and not like thieves in the darkness. Now, report to your company for duty, and don't let this occur again." We felt just then like throwing up our hats and hurrahing for Colonel Bacon, but we forbore lest it might commit him in the eyes of others, but in our inmost hearts we felt thankful, and were happy indeed to escape from the doom that hung so closely over us.

After that we went in day time, and generally managed to fill a haversack with potatoes and our pockets with peaches. We remained at this camp some four weeks I think, and were then ordered on transports and proceeded up the Mississippi River to the mouth of White River, and

up White River to a small place called St. Charles. Here we acted as infantry and did picket duty. We were here only a few days before we were ordered down to the mouth of the White River, and went into camp on the bank of the Mississippi for a few days, until transportation could be furnished to carry us down the great river again toward the gulf, as well as river gunboats to guard us as we passed to and fro through the enemy's country.[41]

At last the transports came — two boats to carry the regiment. I must follow the adventures of one only—the one upon which my company was transported. It was the ill-fated *Clara Belle*. Boys, do you remember her? The other transport carrying the larger share of the regiment went in advance, escorted by a strong gunboat. We proceeded down quietly and softly for many miles. Gradually the foremost boat gained upon us, being the fastest boat, and it would disappear around the lower bend as we came upon the upper bend of the river. Still we felt no alarm; nothing had given us any cause for doubts for our safety. At last we hailed in sight of a long stretch of straight channel and no boats were visible in front of us; they had distanced us so much that they had made the bend below and were out of sight. Yet we knew they had only just passed and if any danger appeared we should receive warning, and we felt no misgiving as we steamed on down toward the big bend below. Only a few moments though were we thus unconcerned. We were lying upon the hurricane deck under the awning, some at one game, some at another, to pass the time away. But what's that which salutes from the bend behind the levee? It is more of those spherical case shells, from a full battery of Rebel guns. We are in for it—too close to retreat, and we must either run the gauntlet of death, or surrender to march on Andersonville. We scrambled for the lower deck and sought protection behind cotton bales placed

41. The 6th left Vicksburg July 23, 1864, and the attack on the transport which Johnson describes in the following pages occurred on July 24th near Ashton, Ark.

there on purpose for such an emergency. We were opposite the battery in the bend; shot and shell had done fearful work, our boat being riddled from stem to stern, with one or two shots below the water line in our hull, and water was flowing in freely. The men deserted the fires, while the captain blew his whistle and put in toward shore. The firing ceased and we heard those Rebels saying, "Ah ha! we've got you now, you d—d Yankees. Come in here and we'll settle with you." The next moment we heard the stern old voice of Captain Corden say, "Put men to the fires, boys to the pumps, and you, captain of this craft, head her down the stream in a moment or your life ain't worth a hafer. Men put in everything you can to make steam fast."

At it they went; we headed down stream, and amid the curses of the Johnnies and their most terrific fire, we ran the gauntlet. Men were wounded and dying. Terrible indeed, was the ordeal we were passing through. It seemed an age, but at last their shells no longer reached us and we were out of range. We had a moment's time to cast about us and note the results of the run. The orderly sergeant of Company F had one leg shot off at the ankle. Comrade Winslow of Company C, was severed half in two across the abdomen by a shell. One or two were killed, I think. The captain of the boat said we were safe now from the battery on that side of the river, as there was an impassable bayou, so that they could not come down on the opposite bank. It was necessary for us to land and lighten up the boat so that the leaks could be repaired, so we pulled up to the shore in a feeling of safety from our late foes.

CHAPTER XXII

Our boat hauled up to the bank on the opposite shore and we landed our men, excepting the sick and wounded. We were told that by going eight miles across this bend in the river we could reach the gunboat station some twenty miles above by the river. Volunteers were called to go across and obtain aid from the fleet. Your humble servant was among the ten men that volunteered to go across the enemy's country for rescue. We immediately pushed out on our mission. The first three miles travel was through a swamp, with no road or guide to tell us the way. Emerging from the swamp we came out upon a plantation which we crossed, and found a main traveled road leading direct to the landing where the gunboats lay. We went to the house and obtained milk to drink, and seeing a melon patch we ate of them to our fill, cautioning the darkies not to tell of our visit. We then proceeded on to the landing, which we reached in safety. Little did we think that in less than twelve hours we should traverse the same ground over again. The fortunes of war are fickle in the extreme. We reported the situation of things to the fleet, and immediately a strong gunboat was got in readiness to go down to guard us.

We went on board and were hospitably treated by the marines, who shared their rations with us at the evening meal. We steamed down the river as fast as the logy old boat could go, and when about half way we heard firing in the vicinity of our rendezvous. As we passed the bend where we run the battery we gave the ground some passing compliments, but elicited no reply. Eagerly we watched for sight of our boat. But lo, only a blackened hull greeted our view —the *Clara Belle* was burned to the water's edge. We were soon at the landing and learned that the Confederates had managed to get their battery across the bayou and had come down on the beach just opposite our boat, where they commenced firing into its defenceless position succeeding in setting fire to it after a few shots. Amid the terrible fire of

shell our noble and big-hearted surgeon, C. V. Mottram, carried our wounded sergeant off on his back to a place of safety. Our wounded comrade who was left alive on the boat, could not be moved, and was burned. I think, however, he was past all sense of danger and realized nothing, so near was he to death's door. I had left my knap-sack and trunk on the boat full of clothing, and they were all burned; also all my keep-sakes, pictures, letters and presents. All I had left were the clothes upon my back. As soon as the gunboat reached the place we were landed, and all wounded and sick comrades were put on board and sent to some hospital.

Now, we must traverse this same route over again, for we could not remain here, and the gunboat must pass on and take our sick and wounded to the hospital. We volunteers must again lead the way through the swamp. Darkness had gathered over the land and we were compelled to move cautiously. Everything being in readiness we took up the route step and plunged into the forest. Luckily we did not miss our point of compass in the least, and came out of the woods at the same point we did in the daylight. We soon had the boys on the main road; then being very tired and weary we fell back to the rear of the column.

We soon came to a large plantation and halted to reconnoiter. We had noted these places in our previous march. Cautiously we approached the big mansion and the negro quarters. We soon learned that not a single white person was on the place—only a few slaves. The owner was away on important business somewhere, and we learned afterward that he was an officer in this same battery which had caused us so much loss and damage. We did not wait very long before we proceeded to look the mansion over in quest of what we needed. The boys took many things. All your humble servant took was clothing and a large quilt for a blanket, and a big feather bolster for a bunk mattress. I admit that some of the underclothing I found was of the best material and did me excellent service until the close of the war and after. I felt justified in this confiscation under

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the circumstances. Late in the evening, or early morning rather, we stragglers came in, bearing our burdens. We had chickens for the morning meal—must have something to eat, and the Confederates having burned all our rations, what else could we do?

On the afternoon of the next day this same planter that was away on urgent business while we called upon his home, came down to the landing and made a terrible complaint that the Yankees had, during his absence to town on business, stolen everything in his home, and that he was a true Union man, and loyal to the Federal government, and he wanted search made to recover his goods. Poor fellow! it was too bad to rob him when he was so innocent! His business in dealing out such a hand to us from his Rebel battery was loyal indeed! Our officers claimed that they did not know of this. Old Capt. Corden, of Company F, had a small boy for errand and waiter boy for himself. He immediately despatched this boy to give us warning that a search was to be made for stolen goods, in a couple of hours. It was sufficient warning for us, and soon we had all our confiscated goods in safe quarters, and when Mr. Loyal Secesh came around naught did he find belonging to him. It was the same in the other companies, I believe, and he went away muttering curses on the d—d Yankee horde. It served him right, for we ought to have burned every building on his plantation; but we did not do this—we were more generous then he had been to us when we were at his mercy.

We did not remain but two or three days here before we were again put on a transport, accompanied by a gunboat, bound for Morganzie, where the balance of the regiment were encamped. We remained at Morganzie only a few days, when we received orders to report to New Orleans preparatory to going to Mobile, Ala. Nothing of note now transpired until we arrived at the mouth of Mobile bay.

Don't weary, readers, for I am nearly through with my sketches. I trust you will bear with me yet a little longer. From New Orleans we took passage on a gulf steamer and

steamed down the river and out into the great Gulf of Mexico. It was a dark and foggy night, and the pilot missed his point of compass and we brought up off Pensacola harbor, Florida. We then coasted along until we arrived off Mobile Bay and going in, in the night, we missed the channel and ran aground in easy range of the Rebel guns at Fort Morgan, which strong fort had not surrendered as yet. Fort Gaines on the opposite side of the entrance to the bay had surrendered to Commodore Farragut, and was in possession of marines. We felt not "a little skeery" I tell you, after having had our experience on the *Ceres* and *Clara Belle*. But as good luck would have it we got off again soon, and rounded up to Fort Gaines without any serious adventure.

This fort was situated at the point of Daupline Island, and with its mate, Fort Morgan on the opposite side of the entrance, completely commanded the entrance into Mobile Bay. The Sixth Michigan at once took possession of Fort Gaines, and soon had the grand sight of seeing the great land and naval engagement that reduced Fort Morgan. We saw how the monitors would slip up under the very guns of the fort and deal out their terrible destruction. For two days and a night the bombardment was unceasing. Then we saw the dense smoke rise from the center of Fort Morgan, that told us the fort was on fire. Soon thereafter the flag of truce ran up, and Fort Morgan was ours, with all its garrison prisoners. In a short time several companies of the Sixth crossed over and took possession of this fort also.[42]

We now commanded the entrance to the great bay, and the forces were sent inland to reduce Mobile City and the many forts in its immediate vicinity. Company F remained on Daupline Island for the space of eleven months. We

42. The 6th Infantry garrison companies at Fort Gaines were: C, E, F, H, I, from Aug. 23, 1864 to July 9, 1865. At Fort Morgan the garrison companies were: A, B, D, G, K, for the same period. See Robertson, p. 268, for details on detachments made from these garrisons.

fared sumptuously upon fish and oysters, which we caught ourselves. We did garrison duty and took things easy for soldiers. Often times did some of our soldiers take a big yawl and spreading sail, skip away toward the mainland some twelve miles away, where were several families of honest old fishermen, with numbers of robust damsels ready to trip the "light fantastic toe" whenever we came over and brought our music. Many were the pleasant times we passed over there in an old double log-house which had a hallway through the center, large enough to admit of two sets for quadrille.

The long and dark night of civil war is dawning at last into the welcome day of peace; the clouds are lifting, and we know that soon peace will be declared and we will return to our homes. Soon we receive orders to report to the muster-out camp at Greenville, La., just above New Orleans, and in my next chapter I will give some little incidents concerning that change.

CHAPTER XXIII

Taking a gulf steamer we passed on to the mouth of the great river, which we were about to enter, perhaps for the last time. At quarantine we were halted in the evening to wait for the quarantine surgeon to examine our boat. It rained fearfully, pouring down in torrents. They wanted us to lie in the channel until morning, but we said, "no, we must go on up the river and be at camp in the morning; if you do not desire to quarantine us to-night we will pass up without." They finally came on board terribly incensed, and having quarantined us, allowed us to pass on up the river. On the morrow we found ourselves at the muster-out camp at Greenville.[43]

Our camp was located, our tents pitched, the guard-lines staked out, and the regular guard put on. We soon learned that some of our officers were anxious to go to Texas, and were trying to hold the regiment for such service. I tell you we protested, and gave them to understand that we would make them rue the day they ever took us off down there after we had been four years in the service. In a couple of weeks, however, we became confident that they had abandoned this project. Our men crossed the guard-lines as though no guard was there. Double guards were put on; still matters were no better; then we were promised that we should go home, and with this things changed. Order was again restored, and all went joyfully.

One afternoon an orderly came riding up from the city and we suspected the news, and soon learned that it was

43. The 6th arrived at Greenville, four miles above New Orleans, on July 11, 1865. Here, new equipment was issued for service in Texas, but on August 5th orders to muster out were received. Mustering out took place on August 20th and on the 23rd the regiment, under command of Col. Charles E. Clark, left for Cairo, Illinois. It arrived at Cairo on the 28th and went by rail to Jackson, Michigan, arriving on the 30th, where the regiment was paid off and discharged on September 5, 1865.

an order for the Sixth Michigan to be mustered out. Oh, I'll never forget that afternoon, evening, midnight and early morn. Boys threw up their hats and shouted and cheered until their throats were sore. In the evening campfires were lighted and joy prevailed throughout the night. We are going home at last, the war is ended, and the nation saved! Why shouldn't we be happy and full of enthusiasm? The guards were reduced to a minimum, and we were allowed to go and come pretty much at will. Your humble servant received those twelve large muster-out rolls and commenced immediately to complete the work of making our soldiers citizens again. Four days and nights we worked upon them before we were able to pronounce them completed. Some other companies had been more expeditious, but had their work to do over, so we came out ahead at last. Our rolls were accepted upon first draft. I tell you those were happy hours to me when engaged in that work for my comrades. Our transportation came, and once more we pass up the great river toward our homes and loved ones. In due time we arrived at Cairo, where we took the cars for Joliet Junction, and at that place the Michigan Central Railroad to Jackson, Mich.

Once more in our native home. What a happy thought! But sad indeed were the recollections of the many dear comrades that we had left sleeping in the southern clime. We found we must wait a few days before we could receive our final discharge, and we all skipped home, returning again for our official documents.

I am now done with my sketches. If any comrades of the Sixth Michigan have criticisms to make they can do so. I have tried to do the best I could. I must thank my dear and esteemed comrade, W. L. Smith, for his kindness in giving my serial place in the columns of the VETERAN. Of course I could have made my serial much longer and given more incidents, but I have thought that other comrades might want the space. If any of my comrades ever visit our city of Kalamazoo, I would say, "drop in, the latchstring is out." You will find me at 227 East North street.

With love to all the comrades I bid you, good bye.